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THE EUROPEAN WORLD 1500–1800

An Introduction to Early Modern History

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Gender and Family

Bernard Capp

Introduction

A popular story in early modern England told the adventures of Long Meg of Westminster, a doughty young woman who dressed as a man, fought and overcame male adversaries and performed heroic feats in Henry VIII's wars against France. Contemporaries were always intrigued by the idea of turning gender roles and assumptions upside down. But these flights of fancy usually ended with the restoration of conventional values and Meg's story, too, ends with her marrying and vowing to be a respectful and obedient wife (Mish 1963). Gender constituted one of the key foundations of the European order, shaping almost every sphere – social, economic, religious and political. Though there were significant changes over the early modern period, as we will see, the fundamental assumptions underpinning educated and popular thinking, very different from those of today, survived intact. Reaching back to classical and biblical times, they were rarely challenged, and inevitably they influenced relationships within the family too. The ideal family was seen as a loving partnership, but one in which the husband's supremacy was sacrosanct. Then as now the family was perceived as the social unit best equipped to raise children and transmit society's values to the next generation. In many other respects, however, the family differed sharply from its modern equivalent, in character, function and composition. It possessed a political and economic as well as a social dimension; its composition was unstable (through death, rather than divorce); and it frequently contained members biologically unrelated to either parent.

Gender

It was an axiom throughout Europe that the two sexes possessed very different characteristics, and that the male was superior. Such beliefs, standard for centuries, rested on several interlocking ideas. The Christian religion was essentially male-orientated, like the Judaic tradition from which it had sprung. God had created Adam first, with Eve as his companion and 'helpmeet'. Eve's weakness in the face of temptation had triggered man's fall and expulsion from the Garden of Eden. The New Testament reinforced the message, with Jesus choosing male disciples and St Paul preaching the duty of obedience by women. The Protestant Reformation further strengthened religion's male character by rejecting the cult of saints and of the Virgin Mary. This religious teaching was supported by medical science stretching back to the

Greeks. Aristotle had taught that women were imperfect men. For centuries physicians explained that the human body was composed of four 'humours', and that the balance found in women (primarily cold and moist) made them intellectually, morally and physically weaker. Some physicians believed there was only a single sex, with the humoral balance alone responsible for creating male and female sexual identities, so that a man might turn into a woman, or vice versa, should the balance be reversed (Laqueur 1990). Such fears may have contributed to nervousness about gender roles and alarm whenever women imitated male dress or men behaved effeminately. Other factors also underpinned traditional gender roles. Physical strength remained an essential requirement in many occupations, including agriculture, which gave men an obvious advantage. Though manual work made many women physically strong, this was offset by repeated pregnancies and the care of small children. Equally important was the power of custom. Gender-based assumptions had led in many areas to the exclusion of women from education, from many trades and from the professions. Without education or training, women inevitably appeared incapable of taking on male roles. Moreover, most people naturally absorbed the ideas and values of the society in which they had grown up, and even strong-minded individuals tempted to challenge them could not point to any place or time when things had been different (Box 1).

Box 1

'That the Custom of the World has put Women, generally speaking, into a State of Subjection, is not deny'd; but the Right can no more be prov'd from the Fact, than the Predominancy of Vice can justifie it ...

'I do not propose this to prevent a Rebellion, for Women are not so well united as to form an Insurrection. They are for the most part Wise enough to Love their Chains, and to discern how very becomingly they set.'

(Astell 1706, 72, 82)

A proto-feminist, Mary Astell made biting observations about marriage and male authority, but saw no prospect of change and regarded women as complicit in their subordination.

Throughout Europe, early modern society can be described as PATRIARCHAL, with male authority underpinned within the family and in society at large by a web of laws, regulations and custom. We should also note, however, the importance of regional variations. Roman law, religion and custom combined to limit women's freedom and rights far more severely in Southern Europe than in the north. Foreign visitors sometimes described England (with considerable exaggeration) as a paradise for women; no one spoke in such terms of Spain or Italy, where middle- and upper-class women were largely confined to the home.

Gender and education

Knowing that gender would be a major factor shaping their children's future, parents raised them accordingly. Informal 'dame' or charity schools taught reading, writing (usually only for boys) and basic religious principles. Beyond that, girls were steered towards practical skills such as sewing and embroidery, with formal schooling kept primarily for boys. In Electoral Saxony, 50 per cent of parishes had licensed schools for boys by 1580, while only 10 per cent had schools for girls, who moreover attended only for short periods and received a narrow, mainly practical education. In Italy, a survey of schools in Venice in 1587–88 found 4,600 male pupils and only thirty girls (Wiesner 1993, 122–3). In England too, grammar schools were for boys. A teacher appointed to a school at Crosby, near Liverpool, in 1651 was horrified to discover that some parents wanted their daughters also to attend, and quickly resigned in the face of such 'barbarity' (Guildhall Library, London, MS 34010/7, ff. 388v–9). Girls' boarding schools began to spread from the mid-seventeenth century, especially near London, though their syllabus was geared more to music and dancing than to academic study. Literacy rates remained everywhere much lower for women than for men: in England, only about 10 per cent of women could write their names in the early seventeenth century. Even Shakespeare's daughter learned only to read, not to write. In Amsterdam, where educational provision was relatively good, a quarter of the men and half the women marrying in 1730 could not sign their names (Hufton 1995, 424). Among the landed elite, girls were educated at home by private tutors. Some became highly accomplished, especially in the Renaissance period, but no one envisaged young women going to university.

Education was about absorbing values as well as skills, and concepts of honour and reputation remained firmly gender-based. For women, chastity and fidelity were everywhere the prerequisites for a good name. While qualities such as thrift and good neighbourliness might win praise, they could not restore a reputation ruined by sexual promiscuity. For men, a good name rested on a wider range of attributes: courage, the ability to maintain and govern a household and 'honesty' in honouring promises and debts. Young, single men, however, with few resources and no family responsibilities, sometimes developed very different codes of honour, based on prowess in fighting, sport, drinking and womanizing (Shepard 2003; Davis 1975, 97–123).

Work

Throughout Europe most boys were destined for a life working the land, either on a family holding or by becoming a live-in farm servant in their teens. They learned skills on the job. Many young women also helped on the family farm or were hired as dairy-maids. And it was expected, indeed required, that a farmer's wife would play an active role, taking responsibility for the poultry, pigs and vegetable garden, running the dairy, and helping with hay-making and harvest (Figure II.1). In the

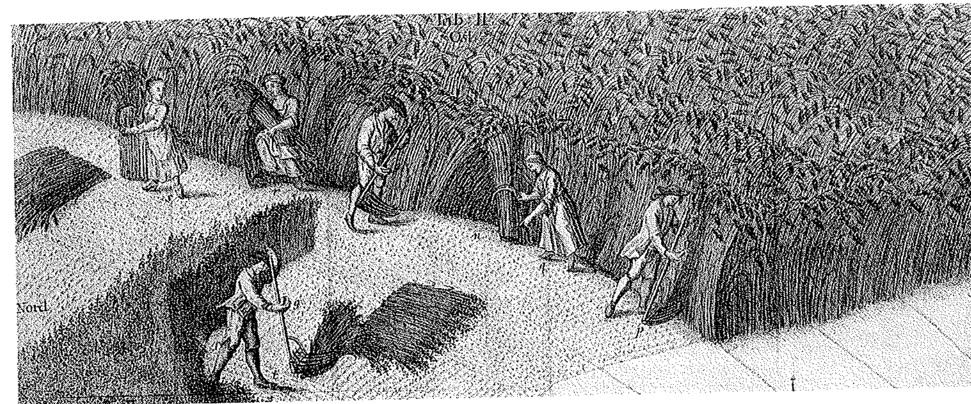

Figure II.1. Men and women collaborate during the grain harvest in eighteenth-century Germany. Mayer 1770, facing 247.

towns, a minority of young men, mostly from more prosperous backgrounds, entered a craft or trade, working as an apprentice and later journeyman for an established master. In a family business, we often find women working alongside their husbands, usually taking charge of selling produce at market. Often, too, a widow enjoyed the right to continue the business after the husband's death. Increasingly, however, guild regulations were tightening to exclude women from membership. Many powerful German guilds barred female servants from working in the shop, and often a master's wife, widow and daughters too. Women were seen as unwelcome competition, and their mere presence (and that of lower-class or illegitimate men) was perceived as compromising the 'honour' of the guild (Wiesner 1998, 163–96). In Spain thousands of women entered the silk-weavers' guild in Seville, but here too similar forces were at work. By the mid-seventeenth century most had become ill-paid piece-workers, with the guilds increasingly restricting the freedom of women, even master-weavers' widows, to operate businesses independently (Perry 1990, 17–18). Almost everywhere, women were pushed into lowly and marginal occupations that had never been organized into guilds. In a few trades which men had never colonized, such as lace-making and MILLINERY, they could sometimes earn reasonably good incomes. Far more often they entered domestic service or worked in poorly paid activities such as spinning, knitting, laundering, sewing or nursing. Women also worked in large numbers in alehouses, taverns and 'fast-food' urban cook-shops or as street vendors, and they dominated the huge second-hand clothing market. The poor of both sexes would often follow several occupations, switching according to season and circumstance. Thus one London woman explained in 1687 that she worked at home winding silk on rainy days, but as a porter at Leadenhall market when it was fine (Capp 2003, 43). Whatever they did, women generally had to juggle paid work with the demands of child-care and running the home ('The Early Modern Economy' in Part II).

The public sphere

In most places women were excluded from the political world. At the very highest level, gender and dynastic principles sometimes collided, as in France, where Salic law forbade a woman to inherit the throne. By contrast Isabella of Castile and Elizabeth Tudor ruled successfully, though Henry VIII had feared that only a son would be able to preserve his dynasty (Box 2).

Box 2

'To promote a woman to bear rule, superiority, dominion or empire above any realm, nation, or city is repugnant to reason, contumely to God ... it is the subversion of good order, of all equity and justice.'

(Knox 1994, 8)

For the Calvinist John Knox, writing in 1558 and swayed in part by religion, gender outweighed dynastic right.

There were later successes too: Maria Theresa in Austria, Catherine the Great in Russia and several female heads of small German territories. But nowhere did such examples lead to any wider reappraisal. Ministers, officials, diplomats were always male and so were urban magistrates. In practice, however, some aristocratic women, such as members of the Guise family, were able to play very active roles in the bloodthirsty politics of late sixteenth-century France. Moreover, women often occupied a significant position at royal and princely courts, wielding informal power through the personal influence they might have with a king, minister or favourite ('Courts and Centres' in Part V). Similarly, contemporaries recognized that the wife of a landowner, local magistrate or parish officer might be more forceful than her husband, and that winning her support could offer their best chance of securing a favourable decision.

Among the poor, women quite often became involved in popular politics of a very different kind, in riots and demonstrations, where gender could play to their advantage. Women protesting over grain supplies or enclosures were less likely to face retribution; magistrates recognized that a female rebellion was unthinkable and might therefore feel more able to make concessions without losing face (Houlbrooke 1986, 178–86; Capp 2003, 311–18; 'Popular Culture(s)' in Part IV). And at the neighbourhood level, women played an important role in shaping local public opinion, through their 'gossip networks'. Public opinion was a weapon of some significance, for retaining a 'good name' mattered to both men and women. By ostracizing, mocking or rebuking troublesome neighbours or violent, unfaithful husbands, women might shame offenders into mending their ways, and if that failed, their pressure might trigger intervention by parish officers. Equally, they might rally to support a respected woman who had come under threat. Margaret Graeme, a Norfolk villager accused of witchcraft in 1590, was defended by several respectable female neighbours who

had known her for over twenty years and testified to her good character. Proceedings against her went no further (Capp 2003, 286).

Gender was equally reflected in the judicial system. Judges, lawyers and juries were male, and the law regarded husband and wife as one person, the man. That generally gave him control over the money and goods his wife had brought to the marriage and any money she might earn, though control over land she had brought remained more limited. While all this was to the husband's advantage, he also became liable for any debts his wife might incur, and if they committed a crime together, the court would usually hold him solely responsible. As today, most crime was committed by men. Certain categories, however, such as witchcraft, were primarily associated with women, in most parts of Europe ('Witchcraft and Magic' in Part IV), and a double standard meant that women found guilty of adultery or premarital sex were usually punished more severely than the men involved. Unmarried mothers suspected of infanticide were assumed to be guilty unless they could prove their innocence and faced almost certain execution until attitudes softened in the eighteenth century.

The family

The early modern family displays both parallels with and significant differences from the family today. By no means everyone married: in Western Europe roughly 20 per cent of women remained single throughout their lives, and the figures are probably similar for men (Bennett and Froide 1998). For some it was a matter of choice. In Catholic countries a religious vocation might lead men into the priesthood or a monastery, while women might enter a convent, either from choice or because their families were unable to raise a DOWRY to secure a husband. For others, poverty, physical disability or the ravages of illness left them unable to find a partner. In Germany, many craftsmen remained bachelor journeymen, living in male hostels, lacking the resources to set up their own shops or marry. Unmarried women might spend a lifetime in domestic service, with others working 'at their own hands' to earn a living by spinning, knitting, laundering or similar occupations. In most of Northern Europe the NUCLEAR family was the norm, as today, comprising a married couple and their children, with an average family size of four to six. In the Mediterranean region, by contrast, it was common to find larger and more complex families. EXTENDED or MULTIPLE families contained more than two generations and/or brothers and sisters of the main householder (Flandrin 1979, 50–92). In Italy a teenage bride might often marry a much older man and begin married life living in his parents' home, in a very subordinate position.

Perhaps the most striking difference between the modern and early modern household is the presence of people not biologically related to the householders. Farmers might have live-in farm servants, while many modest urban households contained at least one maidservant, often one or two apprentices and perhaps an older journeyman. Two factors lie behind this. First, the home was frequently also the work-place, with the household containing employees as well as parents and children. Second, domestic chores such as washing and cleaning were arduous and time-consuming, making help essential, especially if the wife had children to care for and was helping with her husband's farm or trade (or supplementing their income through part-time work). Hiring a young maidservant made good economic sense, for domestic labour was cheap; an English maidservant in 1600 might expect no more than £2 a year, plus board and lodging. In the poorest families, even children as young as five or six were pressed into assisting with simple tasks that helped to boost the family income. By their early teens poor children might be sent out as live-in servants, which guaranteed them food and shelter and created space in a cramped cottage for the younger siblings. Poor households were generally small; only the well-to-do, able to keep their children at home and employ servants, presided over large households.

It was generally accepted that husband and wife should play different but complementary roles within the marriage. The husband's role was to provide for and govern the household, while his wife managed the home and took primary charge of young children. Any couple straying too far from this pattern would face strong disapproval, ridicule or both ('Popular Culture(s)' in Part IV). Among the landed elites, dynastic and financial concerns outweighed the interests and wishes of the individual, and marriage formation was usually a family matter, arranged by parents who bargained hard over the dowry (the bride's contribution) and JOINTURE (what she would receive, if left a widow). The young couple, especially the bride, often had little choice over the arrangement. Moving down the social ladder, a merchant would often wait years until his business was securely established and then choose a much younger bride, who would be guided by her parents. There was far greater freedom of choice in the lower levels of society, where there was little property at stake. Moreover, with bride and groom often in their mid- to late twenties, they might well have left the family home over ten years earlier by the time they wed, which inevitably reduced parental control. Even the poor, however, usually looked for parental approval and support. It took years for young folk on low wages to accumulate the modest savings needed to set up a home, and material help from parents or employers (or both) was often essential to give their marriage a secure foundation.

Without effective means of birth-control, fertile women often became pregnant every two or three years. A high birth-rate did not lead on to large families, however; many children died in infancy, with over a quarter dying before the age of ten. Only rarely did both husband and wife survive into old age. Repeated pregnancies inevitably threatened a woman's life and health, while (perhaps surprisingly) male mortality was generally even higher. Dangerous occupations, such as mining and seafaring, almost guaranteed an early death, while strenuous farm labour took a heavy toll, and plague and other diseases swept away thousands while still young. Widowers (and to a much lesser extent widows) often remarried quickly, for practical reasons: it usually took two adults to earn an adequate income, run a home and look after children. For those men and women who did reach middle age, failing strength resulted in lower wages,

and old age generally spelled poverty, especially for widows living alone. There was no retirement age, and the Norwich Census of the Poor (1570) records many men and women in their seventies and eighties still working to earn a few pence.

An earlier generation of scholars such as Lawrence Stone argued that married couples felt little affection or warmth for each other or their children. Philippe Ariès even denied that childhood was recognized as such. These views no longer command support. Apart from royal and aristocratic marriages, arranged for political and dynastic reasons, most couples cherished the ideal of a relationship based on affection, trust and partnership (Houlbrooke 1984, 96–126). It was an ideal reflected in popular songs and ballads and reinforced by the fact that husbands and wives usually depended on one another for economic survival, making cooperation a necessity. As today, the reality often fell short, and many couples lived unhappily with poverty and drink breeding bitterness and domestic violence. In other cases one partner, usually the man, simply deserted, and some married again, bigamously. But we can also find many letters and diaries that record deep love and affection between couples, pride in their children's progress, and devastating grief when a child died. They remind us how much we share with our ancestors, however different their world (Box 3).

Box 3

'Honest, kind, dearest, closest bridegroom:

With longing and heartfelt joy I received your letter ... Kind and dearest treasure, with this letter I am sending a little string which you may bind [about your wrist] on my behalf and thereby think of me ...

Magdalena, y.l.b.' [your loving bride]

'Honest, kind, dear Paumgartner:

Your letter from Augsburg has come ... I paid the tailor already after your departure ... I have given your brother Jorg the money that belongs to Bartel Abrecht to deliver ... I will not neglect to admonish the peasants ... The wine, or rather new wine, came the Sunday after your departure ...

Kind, dear treasure, I have nothing more to write at this time ... Magdalena.'

(Ozment 1989, 39-43, 70-2)

Magdalena Paumgartner writing to her husband Balthasar, a Nuremberg merchant, in 1582 and 1594. The couple's letters show a happy marriage based on affection and a close working partnership.

Continuity and change

The early modern period witnessed several significant changes affecting both gender and the family. The Protestant Reformation was at best a mixed blessing for women ('The Long Reformation' in Part III; Roper 1989). In theory, justification by faith

alone made men and women spiritual equals and removed (male) priests as indispensable intermediaries. It elevated the status of marriage, rejecting celibacy as a superior state, and through sermons and domestic conduct-books promoted the values of married love, mutual responsibilities and mutual rights. New marriage laws in towns such as Zurich enabled both husbands and wives to sue for divorce and to remarry, if their partners had committed serious faults such as adultery and reconciliation proved impossible (Ozment 1983, 80–99). But Protestants always stressed the father's authority, and – just like Catholic reformers – they were anxious to regulate marriage more tightly by discouraging informal weddings based on the simple exchange of vows, demanding parental approval and prosecuting couples for premarital sex. Divorce remained everywhere difficult to obtain (and impossible in Catholic countries, as well as in England). In the religious sphere itself, Protestantism removed women's option of a religious vocation and the possibility of achieving any position of authority. In the event, some women carved out new forms of vocation for themselves, and in Germany, France and elsewhere we can find devout women using their personal interpretation of scripture to challenge the authority of the Catholic Church or a non-believing husband. Others felt a call to spread the gospel by preaching or writing, and women played a leading role in the evangelical missions of the early Quakers and early Methodists. Over time, however, Protestant movements generally became more conservative and restrictive. The Catholic Reformation, for its part, triggered a burst of female religious activity, finding expression in lay orders devoted to working with the poor and sick, such as Angela Merici's Ursulines in sixteenth-century Italy and the Daughters of Charity in seventeenth-century France.

There were other significant changes. Guild controls gradually weakened over the period, and women played a prominent part in the proto-industrial cloth and silk industries, if mainly in ill-paid work at home as spinners and silk weavers. And as most innovations in the textile industry occurred outside the guilds, opportunities for women opened up there as well as in the burgeoning retail sector. There were broader changes too in the prevailing views of gender. By the eighteenth century the humoral understanding of the body was losing ground, and women were increasingly seen as frail rather than threatening, needing protection, not control. Both views, of course, reinforced men's perception of patriarchal authority as natural and essential. Public debate over relations between the sexes continued throughout the period, increasingly aired in print. Many writers, drawing on scripture and history, pointed to striking examples of pious, brave and intelligent women. One sixteenth-century French poetess argued daringly that Christ had been incarnated as a man only because a female saviour would have been unacceptable in the Jewish society of his time (Davis 1975, 188). Shakespeare created numerous heroines for the stage who were intelligent, witty and forceful. And if the combative Katharina was eventually subdued in *The Taming of the Shrew*, the tables were turned in John Fletcher's sequel, *The Tamer Tamed*. A contemporary proverb, acknowledging the need for women to play an active role in the family and community, advised that in choosing a wife,

'better a shrew than a sheep'. Proto-feminists argued that women were by nature the equals of men and held back only by lack of educational opportunity. But in practice assertions of the intrinsic 'worth' of women posed little real threat to male control. Even Mary Astell, who published a brilliant critique of society's gender bias, could not suggest any means to bring about change. Any woman who posed a more direct challenge was quickly silenced. One who had mastered enough legal expertise to practise as a solicitor in London was arrested in 1654 and dispatched to the Bridewell, among vagrants, pickpockets and prostitutes (*Calendar* 1654, 67). At the very end of our period, in 1793, the French actress Olympe de Gouges was guillotined by the Jacobins, after daring to demand political rights for women as well as men. Even in the French Revolution, gender equality remained a shocking idea. If history is mainly about change, in gender relations the continuities are more striking.

Discussion themes

1. How far did practical considerations modify the 'official' view of appropriate gender relations, within the family and beyond?
2. Do you agree that continuity is more evident than change in this period?

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Marginals and Deviants

Penny Roberts

All societies identify as suspect and threatening certain types of behaviour, appearance or lifestyle which differ from the prevailing norms. As a result, associated individuals or groups are marginalized, ostracized or actively persecuted. Although these groups may be quite diverse in the nature of their difference, some common stereotypes recur: their predilection for acts of sexual depravity, criminality and other anti-social behaviour, accompanied by metaphors of pollution and disease (Douglas 1991). From early Christians through the heretical groups of the Middle Ages to the Protestants of the early modern period, religious minorities in Europe were accused of indulging in orgies, ritual violence and abuse of the mainstream faith. Jews and witches faced similar accusations. Above all, such groups or individuals were believed to pose a direct threat to respectable, law-abiding Christian society. Many of these prejudices were a continuation of those of the Middle Ages, although the groups at which they were directed could fluctuate. For instance, Jews had been expelled from several European countries, only to re-emerge in cities like Venice, where they were confined to a circumscribed area known as the GHETTO ('Jews and Muslims' in Part III). With the advent of the Reformation, heresy entered the mainstream; Protestants and Catholics condemned each other's beliefs while uniting to safeguard society from radicalism, atheism and immorality. At a time when SERFDOM declined in Western Europe, it was reinforced in Central and Eastern Europe; the incidence of slavery in the Mediterranean increased and the transatlantic slave trade began. Rising levels of poverty led to particular concerns about the menace of vagrancy and associated criminality. Prostitution, too, was increasingly criminalized, as were the practices associated with witchcraft ('Witchcraft and Magic' in Part IV).

Many large towns in Europe contained foreigners and refugees. Ports and other major trading centres housed communities of foreign merchants. The expulsion of MORISCOS from the Iberian peninsula in the early seventeenth century, the flight of Huguenots from France during periods of persecution and the harassment of radical sects throughout Europe led to new settlements by refugees in areas as far apart as New England and Poland. Although many of these communities were successfully integrated, they still represented a convenient scapegoat at times of crisis. Increasing numbers of vagrants generated a fear of criminal gangs roaming the countryside and posing a threat to property through theft or arson. This prejudice also dogged the movement and settlement of gypsies or Roma throughout Europe. The spectrum of marginalization and active persecution varied according to the relative threat which

such groups were believed to pose, in a given place at a given time, to the society in which they lived.

Dishonourable trades

Not all professional activities were of equal standing in early modern society: at the top of the social hierarchy were merchants, lawyers, doctors and goldsmiths in towns, and substantial free farmers in the countryside. At the bottom were the so-called 'dishonourable trades' such as executioner and skinner (both responsible for the taking of life), grave-digger and latrine-cleaner, plague-worker and prostitute. Their marginalization took the form of ostracism. They could be refused citizenship, membership of GUILDS, medical treatment and entry to social spaces such as inns and bath-houses (although prostitutes regularly frequented these). They were often forced to live in the most insalubrious districts of towns alongside others classified as deviant. Direct business contact with them was allowed, but no socializing, friendship or intermarriage, because those involved were believed to be tainted by association. In Augsburg, when a young fisherman declared his intention to marry the daughter of a local skinner, both families contrived to keep the lovers apart, but after they both tried to commit suicide they were allowed to wed. As a consequence, the fisherman was ejected from his guild and deprived of his livelihood (Stuart 1999, 1–2). Despite, or because of, their exclusion, 'dishonourable' traders were able to develop their own subculture. Enjoying certain privileges associated with their essential role, and practising social endogamy (intermarriage and occupational heredity), they 'occupied a symbolic position as outsiders' (Stuart 1999, 253).

The poor

In the Middle Ages poor relief came primarily from private individuals and the Church. In the early sixteenth century municipal authorities began to assume that responsibility by taking over some of the existing institutions, and some have attributed this to the rise of Protestantism. Local studies, however, agree that it was the growing incidence of poverty in early modern towns, rather than religious change, which was the driving force (Pullan 1971). It seems that humanist-inspired welfare concerns were more influential than faith in both Catholic and Protestant contexts, although religion was an important factor in deciding who was worthy of relief. Loaded judgements included distinctions between the deserving and undeserving, as well as between the native and foreign poor, as more systematic official provision displaced more indiscriminate support. In the seventeenth century, a network of workhouses and penal institutions developed in many major European towns, in which troublesome members of society could be locked up, and which would be forerunners of the modern prison and sanatorium (Foucault 1991). At the same time, however, the Catholic Church reassumed some of its responsibility, principally through the efforts

of new religious orders such as the Capuchins. Yet this also reinforced the moral distinction to be made between those who were worthy and unworthy of relief, which resulted in the needy being institutionalized alongside criminals. There was a general movement to clear undesirables including prostitutes, vagrants and petty criminals off the streets; or to herd them into particular slum areas of towns. Expulsion from the community was reinforced by more definitive transportation to the newly established colonies in the Americas and, later, Australia.

The institutionalization of workhouses and what might be termed 'community service' (digging and clearing ditches, repairing walls and roads) was a development pioneered in the Netherlands. It soon spread to other European countries as the numbers seeking and in need of poor relief soared. The poor became badged and, therefore, dishonourable members of the community, just as Jews, lepers and prostitutes before them. Badging and distinctive dress, as well as mutilation and branding, ensured that difference and dishonour were recognized. The 'Great Confinement' in houses of correction or BRIDEWELLS suited authorities and elites but also wider society. 'The basic tenets and programmes of any poor relief system reflect the values of the society in which the system functions' (Jütte 1994, 197).

Medical outcasts

Leprosy had all but disappeared from much of Europe by 1500, but plague was still a regular visitor. Victims of plague were feared, but so too were human agents believed to deliberately spread the disease. In the towns of the western Alps, a number of so-called 'plague spreaders', primarily foreign women who were paid to clean the linen and to clear the houses of the diseased, were executed. Motivated by greed, they were believed to have propagated infection through the use of a special grease (Naphy 2002). Those who we would now classify as suffering from mental illness or a neurological condition were kept hidden away by their families or left to fend for themselves as well as they could on the streets and highways of early modern Europe, alongside beggars, both able and disabled. Epilepsy and depression (or 'melancholy') were associated with demonic possession and subsequently sufferers were subject to a variety of traumatic 'treatments'. Lunacy, although similarly misdiagnosed, was nevertheless admissible as a defence in court.

Human curiosities acted as popular forms of entertainment. Fools and dwarfs continued to be a fashionable accessory at many European courts. Monstrous births (of deformed humans or animals) attracted great interest and sometimes public display. Disability and deformity were sources of both repulsion and fascination. Meaning was sought in why God would have afflicted those who were supposedly made in his image in this way. The sins of the afflicted, or of society more generally, provided the usual answer. Yet as scientific knowledge developed, so too did an interest in understanding as well as observing affliction. Monsters existed in a liminal space between curiosity and prodigy, subject to 'the tolerance conferred by greater

scientific understanding of a certain condition, and superstitious horror at that which does not conform to rigid roles of sex, race or species' (Long 2006, 192).

Sexual deviants

Whatever the source of difference, sexual deviance was seen as a common characteristic. Lepers and Jews were associated with lasciviousness and Muslims with perverse sexual practices. Protestants claimed that Catholic clergy seduced nuns and female parishioners. Witches were accused of having sexual intercourse with the devil, and vagrants of having many short-lived liaisons. Perceptions of sexual deviance could be very wide-ranging indeed. In theory, any sexual act outside marriage, and even any non-procreative act within marriage, was forbidden by the Church. The position deemed most advantageous for conception, with the man on top, was hierarchically symbolic. Nevertheless, sexual pleasure was allowable and often believed necessary for both parties in order for procreation to take place (which made accusations of rape resulting in pregnancy inadmissible). Sodomy was a term used for a wider selection of activities than simply anal intercourse, including masturbation, oral sex and bestiality. Often, however, only the most heinous and publicly scandalous offences came to trial, and although death by burning was prescribed, judges often handed out lesser sentences. While railed against by moralists, the behaviour of notorious libertines such as the earl of Rochester or the marquis de Sade made them into celebrities.

Figure II.5. With its portrayal of power games, pleasure-seeking and sexual conquests among the Parisian elite, the epistolary novel *Dangerous Liaisons* by Pierre Choderlos de Laclos (1782) scandalized and fascinated eighteenth-century readers in equal measure. This illustration by Niclas II Lafrensen depicts an amorous encounter between the viscount of Valmont and the courtesan Emilie.

Notable too is the commercial success of erotic and pornographic literature in the eighteenth century ('Enlightenment' in Part IV; Figure II.5).

Homosexuality, although condemned in theory, was often tolerated in practice if it did not outrage public decency (Merrick and Ragan 2000). In the cities of Venice and Florence, distinctions were made between young men for whom such acts could be seen as a passing phase prior to the more 'natural' outlet of marriage, and older men indulging in pederasty (Rocke 1996). For women, an outlet for erotic desire was provided within the special context of nunneries and the delicate constellation of spiritual ecstasy, marriage to Christ and close physical proximity to other sisters (Brown 1986). There was much concern with who took the active (therefore male) and passive (therefore female) role in the relationship. Historians of sexuality are divided over whether there was a distinctive homosexual culture in the pre-modern period, although the so-called molly houses of eighteenth-century London suggest that by the end of our period, at least in a larger metropolis, this was the case. In a criminal case against 'Mother Clap' in 1726, a witness described how he 'found near Men Fifty there, making Love to one another as they call'd it. Sometimes they'd sit in one anothers Laps, use their Hands indecently Dance and make Curtsies and mimick the Language of Women' (Proceedings of the Old Bailey: Web resources). Lesbians only tended to come before the courts due to the scandal caused by a woman subverting the natural order by pretending to be a man. The idea of a woman giving physical satisfaction to another woman threatened masculine superiority. The sexual ambiguity of HERMAPHRODITES, who possessed both male and female genitalia, was viewed as destabilizing if they did not adopt a single gender identity. They could cause all kinds of judicial confusion when they came before the courts (Box 1).

Box 1

When asked, during a trial before the Inquisition at Toledo in 1587, if s/he had had relations with any other women as if s/he were a man, Elana/Elano de Céspedes answered:

> 'I've had carnal relations with many other women, especially with the sister of the priest I served .... But ... none of the women I've known was aware that I had female organs, since I was always able to cover them up. My wife María del Caño never knew I had a woman's nature. Even though it's true that many times María desired to put her hand on my shameful parts, I never let her do it, even though she wanted to very much ... .'
>
> *(Kagan and Dyer 2004, 36-59; quotation 48)*

After she was arrested for sodomy, the chief accusation against Elana/Elano before the Inquisition was sorcery as well as concerns about bigamy. In her teens s/he had been married to a man and had a child, but had subsequently lived and worked and remarried as a man. The Inquisition ordered that s/he henceforth live as a woman. The case shows the concern of the authorities about sexual ambivalence and the social instability it caused.

Prostitution, previously the socially acceptable outlet for male sexual energies in particular, was largely driven underground as part of a wider moral agenda during the early modern period. In the Middle Ages prostitutes were frequently taxed according to their trade like any other workers, and many cities even established official bordellos or bath-houses. Attitudes seem to have changed by the mid-sixteenth century, after which prostitutes and their clients had to operate with much more discretion. Even so, known prostitutes were sometimes brought in to judge cases of impotency and even their claims of rape were not dismissed out of hand. Rape in general was a crime extremely hard to prove, and society only took an unambivalent attitude if a young child was involved. The Catholic Reformation spawned a number of religious orders which took charge of rehabilitating repentant prostitutes. The English Society for the Reformation of Manners undertook its own moral crusade to close brothels and bawdy houses, which became officially prohibited in many parts of Europe (Amster 2007). The authorities were aware that their focus on sexual immorality might also generate prurient interest in the practices they condemned. There was a thin line between descriptions and depictions of illicit behaviour and pornography.

Criminals

Levels of crime are hard to assess in any age because cases do not always reach the courts or get recorded in other ways. So much harder to quantify is the 'dark figure' of crime in the past before the development of a professional police force. Nevertheless, historians have tried to assess the incidence of violent crime, such as the number of murders per head of population. Interestingly, it seems that property crime and homicide declined between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, at least in England (Sharpe 1999). Yet infanticide came to be prosecuted more systematically throughout early modern Europe. Details of criminal trials always give the impression of a violent and lawless society, but both changes and continuities are evident between then and now. Most cases involved petty crime, more men than women were brought before the courts; however, many more crimes commanded the death penalty than now lead to life imprisonment, such as heresy, arson and sodomy. Certain witnesses were seen as more reliable than others, according to gender and social status, and levels of proof were much less than required now. Nevertheless, the flexibility of the courts in deciding sentences more lenient than the law might demand is remarkable (Box 2). From our perspective, it is evident that many designated as criminals were forced to break the law through desperation or coercion. Harsh economic circumstances were often at the source of prostitution, poaching, coin-clipping and pick-pocketing. On the other hand, the romanticization of the outlaw's life was a product of the eighteenth century. Notable examples of celebrated careers include the English highwayman Dick Turpin, the German outlaw Johannes Bückler (or *Schinderhannes*) and the Sicilian bandit Rinaldo Rinaldini (Box 3).

Box 2

'Johanna Lane, Arraigned for picking the Pocket of James Harvey of 3 l. 4s. 10d. but he could not positively swear it; and she bringing sufficient Housholders to vouch her honest course of life, the Jury thought fit to acquit her. 25 Feb. 1685.'

'John Skeldon, of the Parish of Christ-Church, was indicted for the Murder of Williams Douglas, the 13th of February last. John Wells depos'd, That he being with the Deceased, the Prisoner came riding along a full Gallop, about 8 a Clock at Night and the Deceased being a Carman, was leading his Horse, when the Prisoner riding, against him, threw him down, and fell upon him with his Knees against his Breast . . . The Prisoner call'd several Persons to his Reputation, who gave him the Character of a peaceable inoffensive Person. The Jury found him guilty of Manslaughter. Burnt in the Hand. 26 Feb. 1724.'

(Proceedings of the Old Bailey; Web resources)

These two cases reinforce the importance of local reputation as attested to by witnesses for influencing the decision-making of juries.

Box 3

'All Italy speaks of him. The Appenine mountains and the Sicilian vales resound with the name of Rinaldini. It lives in the songs of Florence and Calabria and in the ballads of the Sicilians. From the summit of the Alps to the extremity of the Appenines, men talk of his achievements: and when the garrulous villagers of Calabria assemble in the evening before their doors, every one is ready to relate some adventure of the Valeroso Capitano Rinaldini.'

(Hinkley 1848)

This 'Author's Preface' captures the romantic appeal of an oral and musical tradition about a local hero.

A peculiarity of the early modern period was the prevalence of arson scares. Supposed plots were reported in France, Germany and England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and a composite of vagrants, religious minorities and foreigners were blamed. Arson was categorized as a moral crime, but the principal concern here was the security of the state with fire as a weapon of the enemy. Arsonists and witches have recently been identified as the terrorists of the early modern era (Dillinger 2004). The threat posed to society by such groups, and others perceived not to have the usual investment in the welfare of the community, made gypsies and other outsiders especially vulnerable to criminal accusations. They faced overwhelming pressure to conform; resistance was itself interpreted as an act of wilful disobedience to authority and destructive of the harmony of society.

Slaves

In most parts of Christian Europe by 1500, slavery had not been practised since Roman times, although the system of serfdom had effectively tied much of the peasantry to the land and the service of their lords for centuries. In both Christian and Muslim traditions, enslaving coreligionists was forbidden, but enslaving those of another faith was acceptable. Hence the Ottoman practice of taking slaves as tribute from their European lands to staff the harem and the army. Where Muslim and Christian worlds met, principally in the Mediterranean, the practice of taking captives to use as slaves was commonplace. Thus the slave trade in French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and even English, Irish and Flemish captives to North Africa was brisk. Many were taken at sea along with their ships by Barbary corsairs, but coastal raiding was also effective. There was some enslavement of Muslim captives by Christians, mostly on galley ships, but nothing like on the same scale. Although exact figures are elusive, it is estimated that tens of thousands of Christians were seized and enslaved (Davis 2004, 6). Slaves might be returned to their country of origin, sometimes for a ransom, but this was an elaborate process which often took years of familial pressure on the authorities.

Within Africa itself, slavery had been practised between tribes for centuries. Black slaves were imported to Portugal from the mid-fifteenth century through purchase or kidnap (the enslavement of Moors in the Iberian peninsula was well established). When in the sixteenth century the Portuguese and Spanish colonies in the Americas began to seek slave labour to work on their plantations, traders happily cooperated in meeting this demand through the capture and sale of African slaves. As the trade became increasingly lucrative, white Europeans based in Atlantic ports became keen to profit by providing the ships and processing the slaves. Thus, the eighteenth-century prosperity of ports such as Liverpool and Bristol was based on the black slave trade destined for the sugar, tobacco, rice and cotton plantations of the Americas. 'It was at just about the time when Mediterranean slaving began to falter – around the mid-1600s – that the transatlantic trade really took off' (Davis 2004, xxvii).

The eighteenth century was the heyday or peak of the transatlantic slave trade, and it would prove to be very profitable indeed for the traders and masters. Whereas religion had been the distinguishing characteristic of the Mediterranean culture of slavery, race would characterize that of the Americas. It justified to its perpetrators the harsh and inhumane treatment of the non-white 'other'. Millions of Africans were transported overseas in the most appalling conditions and many died of disease or neglect en route or soon after reaching their destination. The principal demand for slaves came initially from the Caribbean and Brazil and, from the seventeenth century, the southern states of North America. Along with the subjugation of the native peoples in the New World, this trade reinforced Europeans' sense of superiority and entitlement to dominate the global economy. It shaped the imperial mindset with its powerful legacy for the modern age. Although by the end of the eighteenth century,

the Americas had begun their struggle for independence from European rulers (and the slaves from their masters), their cultures continued (and continue) to be shaped by that same European inheritance ('Expanding Horizons' in Part IV; 'Beyond Europe c. 1800' in Part VI).

Assessment

Much of the official treatment of deviant or marginal groups in the early modern period was a matter of regulation or containment rather than destruction. Thus even a heinous sin like sodomy was more or less tolerated as long as it was kept within certain bounds and did not become notorious or disruptive. We tend to view deviants only through the lens of prosecution and persecution, chiefly because of the sources through which we know about them: judicial records, trials and legislation. Yet marginal groups sometimes played an important social or economic role which allowed for daily interaction and acceptance within the community. Whereas generalized attitudes towards such groups often proved harsh, personal relationships could temper and encourage toleration and protection rather than betrayal. Nowadays, when issues of difference lead to discrimination this prompts the law to step in to protect minorities or vulnerable groups whereas, in early modern times, laws determined the treatment of such groups in the name of protecting society and, by extension, law and order, state and Church. Yet courts could also act judiciously in individual cases when assessing the seriousness of the threat posed.

Discussion themes

1. Which groups were marginalized in early modern Europe, and why?
2. How harshly did early modern courts deal with deviant behaviour?
3. To what extent did early modern society 'tolerate' deviants?

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From Pen to Print – a Revolution in Communications?

Mark Knights and Angela McShane

Today's digital media have transformed the lives of people living in the west. Digitized images, text and sound mean that we have new ways of accessing what we want to learn about or enjoy, and the range of things we can know about has expanded. Yet the book you are reading is testament to the long reach of another technology that had a similarly transformative effect in the early modern period: print. The printing press was one of three inventions – alongside gunpowder and the compass ('State Building' in Part V; 'Expanding Horizons' in Part IV) – that seemed to revolutionize society. The politician, intellectual and essayist Francis Bacon claimed that 'these three have changed the whole face and state of things throughout the world' (Bacon 1620, Bk. I, cxxix). In this chapter we will consider Bacon's claim in relation to the invention, development and significance of printing and its role in two broader developments: first, the 'communications revolution' of the early modern period and, second, the intellectual, religious and cultural changes of the Renaissance, the Reformation and Enlightenment.

Communication media and the coming of print

Medieval society used a wide range of interconnected oral, written and visual media. Face-to-face exchange predominated, but many individuals and institutions kept records, while scribes produced multiple copies of old and new texts, not only theological works (although they formed the majority), but also literary classics, medical treatises, legal documents and writings related to government business. It was a visual world, too, where symbols, rituals and ceremonies pervaded religious and political interaction. Painted and sculpted images conveyed ideas and told stories, especially before the Protestant Reformation, when churches, civic buildings and homes all over Europe were highly decorated inside and out with images and objects depicting aspects of everyday life and religious belief. Printing added to this web of communicative practices, building on older technologies like the 'codex' or book form (which had largely, though not completely, replaced rolls), paper-making and fixed inks. Movable type in clay, wood and metal had been invented centuries before in China (between 1041 and 1234), and we know that books were printed in the east as early as 1377. But the extensive and systematic exploitation of this

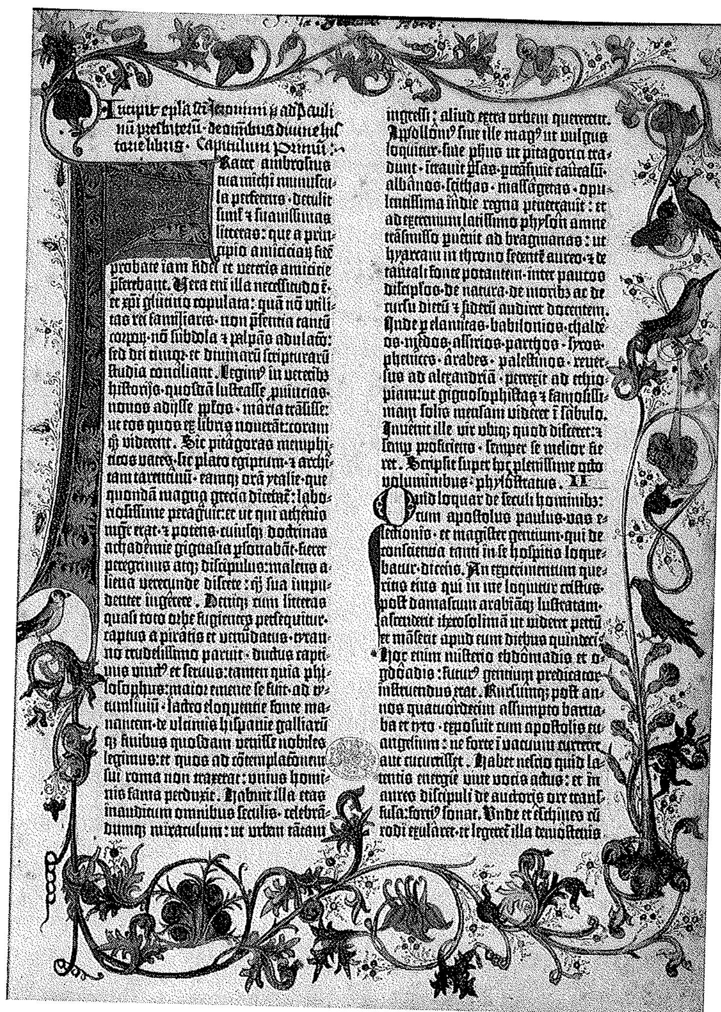

Figure IV.7. Beginning of Jerome's Epistle to Paulinus from the Gutenberg Bible of 1454-55 (vol. 1, f. 1r). Note how Gutenberg produced pages that replicated, as far as possible, typical scribal productions of the period: British Library, London.

technology occurred first in fifteenth-century Europe, perhaps because it was a technology better suited to the more restricted alphabets of the west than to the hundreds of characters required for Chinese printing. The breakthrough came in the 1440s when Johannes Gutenberg combined three innovations: a way of producing movable metal type, a new kind of oil-based printer's ink and the wooden hand press. Cumulatively, these led the way to the mass reproduction of books and a myriad of other printed goods such as pamphlets, pictures, tables, maps, ballads, etc. A defining moment was the production of the 'Gutenberg Bible' at Mainz in 1454–55, the first major book printed in the west (of which forty-eight of the *c.* 180 original copies still survive; Figure IV.7 and Web resources). As Gutenberg's example suggests, printers and booksellers (the early modern equivalent of publishers) were important players in the story of the creation of a market for print (Pettegree 2002).

The expansion of the printing industry was rapid. By 1476 William Caxton had set up the first printing press in England, and by 1500 there were more than 1,000 printing shops across Europe. Their number and output also increased over time, though this was uneven throughout Europe and often depended on the degree of press freedom that governments and Churches allowed as well as on the vigour of religious, political and cultural debate. In England, some 400 titles were published by the first decade of the sixteenth century; 6,000 by the 1630s; 20,000 (after the temporary collapse of governmental control) in the 1640s; 21,000 (after pre-publication censorship was finally abolished in 1695) in the 1710s and 56,000 by the 1790s (Raven *et al.* 1996, 5; Houston 2002, 175). In Germany the Thirty Years War curbed book production: 1620 levels were not achieved again until 1765, but thereafter output became buoyant, with two-thirds of the 175,000 titles published in the eighteenth century produced in its last third. In France, where censorship was stronger, the number of titles increased less dramatically, from just 500 in 1700 to 1,000 by the Revolution of 1789; and in eighteenth-century Russia the figure only reached 250 titles a year in the 1780s (Blanning 2002, 140–2; Box 1).

Box 1

Estimates of European book production:

Before 1500	20 million copies
1500-1600	150-200 million copies
1700-1800	1,500 million copies

(Houston 2002, chapter 8)

The figures in Box 1 are necessarily imprecise, since evidence about print runs is fragmentary. Two or three hundred copies of a title may have been quite common, though larger runs were printed for controversial or best-selling items, and books were also reprinted if there was demand. Books catered for many different markets. There were expensive large (folio) editions sold in bookshops but also cheap print, such as ballads, that could be hawked around by pedlars and achieve widespread dissemination ('English Broadside Ballad Archive': Web resources). The book trade was also innovatory, developing new genres such as the periodical, which flourished in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In France there were 15 periodicals in 1745 but 82 by 1785; in Germany we can trace 58 journals up to 1700 but an incredible 1,225 new ones in the 1780s alone (Blanning 2002, 158–9). Thus the printed word became widely accessible, assisting (and reflecting) an increase in literacy (Box 2).

Box 2

A popular German novel, set in the period of the Thirty Years War and published in 1668, explained how print itself impacted upon literacy: the hero Simplicissimus describes how he was taught to read by his hermit mentor:

> 'Now when I first saw the hermit read the Bible, I could not conceive with whom he should speak so secretly ... when he laid it aside I crept thither and opened it ... and lit upon the first chapter of Job and the picture that stood at the head thereof. [When the hermit explains the nature of the image and the 'black lines' on the page Simplicissimus demands to be taught to read. He explains how the hermit wrote out for him] an alphabet on birch-bark, formed like print, and when I knew the letters, I learned to spell, and thereafter to read, and at last to write better than could the hermit himself: for I imitated print in everything.'
>
> *(Grimmelshausen 1989, 21)*

Simplicissimus's story shows how both pictures and words could act to spread knowledge among all kinds of people, and how the form of printed letters began to affect how people wrote. It also reminds us that learning to read came before learning to write. In the early modern period, reading was increasingly considered an essential skill, for religious as well as social purposes. It is now thought that while the ability to read was reasonably widespread, and augmented by illustrated texts and communal reading practices, the ability to write was much less prevalent, since it took a long time to learn and was only necessary for those who needed to write for their trade.

Literacy rates were on the rise, albeit with significant social, regional and gender variations (Houston 2002). During the century between the 1680s and 1780s, literacy rates in France increased from 29 per cent to 47 per cent for men, and from 14 per cent to 27 per cent for women. In German-speaking countries, the rise was from 10 per cent of the adult male population in 1700 to 25 per cent in 1800 (Blanning 2002, 112–13). Such rates were achieved much later in Eastern and Southern Europe, but earlier in England, where male literacy ran at 30 per cent in 1640 and 45 per cent by 1715, and even higher in London, where under 10 per cent of males were illiterate by the 1720s (Cressy 1980, table 7.3). The rise in literacy, along with the rise in print, fostered the emergence of a reading public that consumed print in a variety of ways (Sharpe 2000; Raven *et al.* 1996). We can detect active and reflective readers, who scribbled notes and comments in the margins of their books; but we also know that reading was considered a sociable rather than a solitary affair (at least until notions of privacy gained sway in the eighteenth century), with material read out aloud to companions. As the amount of print available increased (particularly in metropolitan areas), so reading for some changed from an intensive experience of a few texts to an extensive one, sampling many. Above all, perhaps, print became a form of entertainment as well as a means of disseminating information.

But did all this amount to a print revolution?

The case for a 'printing revolution'

In an influential text that held sway for over twenty years – and which continues to reverberate – Elizabeth L. Eisenstein argued that the development of printing marked a shift from old production methods, which had relied upon handwritten copies, and that the 'transforming powers of print', via the technology of the press, permitted a fixed and reliable mass replication of texts, images and symbols (Eisenstein 1979). Her thesis has since been challenged in several respects, so here we will consider the various arguments in some detail.

Eistenstein's key themes were that the printing press brought about:

- *Standardization*: the ability to reproduce the same text over and over again was important for the acquisition of new knowledge, e.g. in astronomy, since a 'single text might enable scattered observers to scan the heavens for the same signs on the same date'.
- *Diffusion and dissemination of knowledge*: the massive growth in the numbers of books and other forms of print led to increasing scholarly exchange, facilitated by related institutions like libraries and book fairs.
- *Preservation of texts*: print was 'the art that preserved all other arts', allowing the accumulation of texts, data and opinions with a potential to destabilize the established order. (Eisenstein in Grafton *et al.* 2002).

These features, Eisenstein argued, created a new 'print culture' in Europe, which changed the early modern world by shaping the processes we call the Renaissance, Reformation and Scientific Revolution. She pointed out that printing brought new occupational groups (such as printers, publishers and booksellers); gatherings of authors and readers in printing shops; and new marketing and manufacturing techniques. As it was easier to move books than people, these new products – she suggested – transcended geographical borders and limitations of travel. This greatly assisted the gathering and dissemination of knowledge in the 'Scientific Renaissance' ('The Scientific Revolution' in Part IV).

Historians of the Reformation have also noted the importance of print. Scholars such as Robert Scribner see the press as intrinsic to the dissemination and contestation of the Protestant reformations ('The Long Reformation: Lutheran' in Part III, esp. Figures III.3–5). Cheap print, such as ballads and primers, could be used to inculcate piety or, as in the case of visual satires, to ridicule religious opponents. Print allowed the religious debates to be played out to a wide audience and to reflect and shape its thinking (Box 3). Sometimes the link between print and Protestantism was clear: the decision of Sweden's new King Gustavus Vasa to bring about a Lutheran reformation led to the setting up of a Swedish publishing trade for the first time.

Box 3

In his *Book of Martyrs*, the English Protestant John Foxe saw printing as part of the onslaught on Catholic superstition and ignorance:

> 'hereby tongues are known, judgement increaseth, books are dispersed, the Scripture is seen ... times be compared, truth discerned, falsehood detected ... and all ... through the benefit of printing. Whereof I suppose, that either the pope must abolish printing, or ... he must seek a new world to reign over: for else as this world standeth, printing will doubtless abolish him.'
>
> (1583 edn, 707; Web resources)

In Catholic territories, by contrast, Eisenstein argued, scientific advance was hampered by the papal Index Librorum Prohibitorum (Web resources; 'The Long Reformation: Catholic' in Part III). This listed titles forbidden to be printed or read by Catholics and it came to include many scientific books, such as works by Galileo and Brahe. Yet, even in Catholic countries, print fed the imaginations of those relatively low down the social scale. Perhaps the most famous example is Menocchio, a sixteenth-century Italian miller, whose private reflections on what he read were exposed by the Inquisition and revealed a world of heretical belief (Ginzburg 1980).

Another intellectual development in which print arguably played an essential role is the Enlightenment ('Enlightenment' in Part IV). Like the 'Scientific Revolution' and the Protestant and Catholic Reformations, the Enlightenment throve on the dissemination of ideas and challenges to existing authorities. In the mid- and later seventeenth century it played a very significant part in the intellectual ferment of two British revolutions (Zaret 2000). The massive expansion of print in the eighteenth century, which affected Catholic as well as Protestant countries, allowed the circulation of ideas and knowledge as a collective and even pan-European phenomenon. Although states increased their power and ability to clamp down upon dissidents, intellectuals could bypass state censorship and disseminate their ideas by taking advantage of improved travel and communications systems and the international print trade. The Enlightenment philosophe Voltaire, for example, after an early spell in prison for libel in 1718, took to living near Switzerland so that he had access to publishers and printers who were free from French government censorship. In addition to the growth of communications between scholars, intellectuals and political and religious radicals across the Atlantic world, the market for pirate or cheap copies of texts became common. The multi-volume Encyclopédie was reproduced in unofficial editions that collectively ensured a far greater and wider impact than the 'officially' produced original would ever have done alone. Thus the French Revolutionaries looked back to the *philosophes* and their popularizers as precursors who had helped lift the veil of ignorance and tyranny. Robert Darnton argues that cheap print, even the semi-pornographic books of eighteenth-century France, played a key role in carrying Enlightenment ideas (Darnton 1995). Moreover, Enlightenment print was also at the

heart of a growing European and American sociability that had political and cultural repercussions: contemporaries shared their reading in clubs, coffee houses and salons, spreading ideas that chipped away at the established order. Another consequence was that such 'print communities' facilitated the emergence of national identity, especially in states such as the Dutch Republic, Spain, France and Britain, by helping to foster similar imaginative boundaries and shared national cultures. In Britain, for example, the 'news revolution' promoted by the flourishing of periodicals after governmental control on them lapsed in 1695 may have helped to strengthen ties, or a sense of 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983).

Print, then, was arguably part of a revolution in science, religion and ideas; it helped create revolution in seventeenth-century England and bring down the Ancien Régime in France. And it led to cultural transformations across Europe.

The case against a 'print revolution'

Reluctant to place so much emphasis on one new technology, some scholars perceive a wider early modern communications revolution (Behringer 2006). An item of print only had impact once it was disseminated and that relied on improvements in marketing but even more fundamentally in the means of transport. Over the early modern period space and time shrank, as better roads, ships, canals and postal services improved communications. The Habsburgs developed a postal system in the early sixteenth century; and by the end of the eighteenth century there were about 2,500 postal stations in Germany and France. Travelling time between towns was cut dramatically. Thus, whereas in 1500 it took thirty days to go from Hamburg to Augsburg, by 1800 this had been cut to just five for postal couriers (Behringer 2006, 364). News – both manuscript newsletters and then printed newspapers – flowed along such routes; indeed, it depended on them. Without these developments in transport infrastructure the impact of the 'print revolution' might have been rather more restricted.

Historians have also argued that the revolution from a hand-written (scribal) and oral culture to a print culture has been exaggerated (Crick and Walsham 2004, 'Introduction'). Workshops of late medieval scribes had already created large numbers of books and manuscripts that proliferated across Europe. Indeed, whereas for Simplicissimus the character of print shaped the way he wrote, scribal practices and styles could in turn influence print which aped letter forms or imitated manuscript formats. Nor was scribal production suddenly replaced by printing. Hand-written copies of texts continued to flourish at least until the late seventeenth century, especially where censorship restricted the activities of authors and publishers. For much of the early modern period a literate, rather than a print, culture was what mattered, with a key divide between those who possessed or had access to texts and could read them, and those who did not.

Just as scribal practices remained vibrant, oral culture was not undermined or even replaced by 'print culture' ('Popular Culture(s)' in Part IV). Rather, print and oral

culture existed in mutually reinforcing and stimulating ways: what was talked about found its way into print, and what was printed was talked about. Indeed, periodicals aimed at the middling sort – such as the *Tatler* – appeared with the specific intention of providing men and women in taverns, markets, clubs, salons and coffee houses with topics of conversation, and learned journals like the Royal Society's *Philosophical Transactions* stimulated debates all over Europe.

The case for a print revolution argues that it was instrumental in spreading knowledge and information. Yet it can be argued that print spread disinformation. Contemporaries used print but they also distrusted it. This was less the case in the scientific and cultural worlds but more so in the religious, political, social and economic arenas. Far from verifying and establishing 'truth' and 'reason', print could be used to distort and invert them. Paradoxically, then, although print 'fixed' texts, it could unfix truth. Indeed, partisans of all stripes believed their rivals engaged in deliberate attempts to mislead readers. In those circumstances, traditional forms of gauging credit – for example, through social or religious status – remained highly important. Distrust was further boosted by the ubiquitous anonymity of the medium – almost half the number of titles had no attributed author – which apparently allowed writers to lie without fear of reprisal (Figure IV.8). The developing nature of the book trade also encouraged the more disreputable end of the trade, especially in France and England, where by the eighteenth century a 'grub street' of impoverished authors,

THE ENGLISH IRISH SOVLDIER

With his new Disciplin, new Armes, Old Stomacke, and new taken pillage: who had rather Eate then Fight.

If any Souldier think I do appeare,
In this strange Armes and posture, as a Jeere,
Let him advance up to me he shall see,
Ile stop his mouth, and we wil both agree.

Our Skirmish ended, our Enemies fled or slain
Pillage wee cry then, for the Souldiers gaine,
And this compleat Artillery I have got,
The best of Souldiers, I think, hateth not.

My Martiall Armes dealt I amongst my foes,
With this I charged stand gainst hungers blowes;
This is Munition if a Souldier lacke,
He fights like *John a dreame*, or Lents thin *Jacke*.

All safe and cleare, my true Arms rest a while,
And welcome pillage, you have foes to foile;
This Pot, my Helmet, must not be forsaken,
For loe I seiz'd it full of Hens and Bacon.

Rebels for Rebels drest it, but our hot rost,
Made them to flye, and now they kisse the post
And better that to kille, then flay for Pullits,
And have their bellies cramd with leaden bullets.

This fowle my Feather is, who wins most fame,
To weare a pretty Duck, he need not shame;
This Spit my well charg'd Musket, with a Goose,
Now cryes come eate me, let your stomacks loose.

This Dripping pan's my target, and this Hartichoke
My Basket-hilted blade, can make 'em smoke,
And make them fish & cut, who most Home puts,
Its most my fury sheath into his guts.

This Forke my Rest is, and my Bandaleers
Canary Bottles, that can quell base feares,
And make us quaffe downe danger, if this not doe,
What is it then can raise a spirit into faithfull men.

This Match are linkes to light down to my belly
Wherein are dark som chinks as I may tell yee,
Or Sallages, or Puddings, choose you which,
An excellent Needle, Hungers wounds to stitch.

These my Supporters, garter'd with black pots,
Can steele the nose, & purg the brain of plots;
These rosts my shooestrings, steepe in this strong fog,
Is able of themselves to fose a Dog.

These Armes being vanisht, once againe appeare
A true and faithful Souldier As you were;
But if this wants, and that we have no biting
In our best Armours we make sorry fighting.

FINIS.

Printed at London for *F. Wood*, and *A. Coe*. 1642.

Figure IV.8. This anti-cavalier broadside ballad was published, probably with parliamentary approval, in 1642 at the outset of the English Civil War and as part of the enormous printed propaganda campaigns that broke out from 1640. An attack on the pillaging behaviour of cavalier soldiers, copies could be sent all over the country by post and they could be pasted onto whipping posts in market-places, on church doors and on the walls in alehouses – in any place where both cavaliers and roundheads could see them. Anon., *The English Irish Soldier* (1642): British Library, London.

printers and publishers readily invented stories or took both sides of an argument in order to stoke the public appetite. As Filippo di Strata put it: 'The pen is a virgin, the printing press a whore' (Brooks 2005, 4). Print was a business, like any other, that pandered to markets. The profits were as much financial as cultural or intellectual.

Nor, it could be argued, was the print revolution necessarily one that undermined the Ancien Régime; indeed, it could even support and strengthen the role of authoritarian governments. The type of print products available remained surprisingly traditional. Theological debate kept a high profile in the output of the eighteenth century, for all the so-called secularizing tendency of the Enlightenment. Printed satire may have helped to delegitimize notions of a sacred monarchy or an unquestioned Church, but religious texts, sermons, schoolbooks, proclamations and government apologists served to defend it. And print could enhance and enforce authority within the state. Bureaucratization, centralization, more effective fiscal powers, militarization and the defence of ideologies of order were all facilitated by better communications. Moreover, the financial revolutions of the eighteenth century, which saw large amounts of private money invested in governmental debts and loans, relied to an important extent on information being available to investors via the newspapers and other forms of print. Indeed, the activities of the state stimulated printed news: the 'coranto', an early form of newspaper, which developed at the beginning of the seventeenth century in the Netherlands, from an earlier French example, concentrated entirely on foreign affairs and European conflicts.

Finally, even if there was a print revolution in the sense of the greater production and availability of the press, it is hard to establish a clear correlation between text and action. Because propaganda was available, does that guarantee that its message would be followed? Was the French Revolution the result of the Enlightenment and the Enlightenment the result of the press?

Assessment

It is certain that distribution and accessibility of texts increased Europe-wide from the fifteenth century onwards. Historians and literary scholars have pointed to revolutions not just in reading habits and print formats but also in religion, science, politics and wider cultural belief-systems that seem attributable to the press. Yet how far they actually were remains hotly contested. On the one hand, there are many who see the press as really instrumental in fostering a religion of the word, such as Protestantism; as disseminating ideas that both spread a rebirth of classicism and undermined the established order; and as contributing to the state and national identity as well as to a culture of entertainment and new forms of writing. On the other hand, there are scholars who stress that print did not provoke a radical break with the past and that its impact was often dependent on other technologies, especially transport. Far from undercutting an oral and literate culture, print merely reinvigorated it in different ways; print was not always available, especially among the poor and less well-off;

print did not fix truth and reason but promulgated lies, propaganda and polemical irrationalities as one author railed against another. Moreover, the correlation between text and behaviour is uncertain.

Yet these are not mutually exclusive interpretations. We might simply want to build important caveats into our analysis of the transformative power of print. Indeed, in this respect it is helpful to think of the ways in which modern digital technologies coexist with older ones, are taken up at different rates with varying degrees of enthusiasm and foster new ways of thinking and behaving. When we evaluate such questions we are thrown back to problems faced by those who lived in the early modern period. Do changes in communicative practices change the way we think and what we say? Should we embrace transforming technologies or be sceptical about them or both? Are there justifiable limits on the freedom of expression or publishing copyright? How do we discern lies and misinformation, and what can we do about them? These are early modern questions that have a twenty-first-century urgency.

Discussion themes

1. Is the term 'print revolution' misleading?
2. Did changes in communicative practices change belief and behaviour in early modern Europe?
3. Was print necessarily subversive of authority?

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Witchcraft and Magic

Penny Roberts

Magical beliefs and practices permeated early modern European society. It was widely believed that some individuals could perform incredible acts by harnessing the power of supernatural forces. Most people had recourse to 'white' magic at some time in their lives in order to ensure the welfare of loved ones, livestock or crops. It was also understood that such powers or 'black' magic could equally be directed to do harm. This 'magical' worldview encompassed other commonly held beliefs: in prophecy, divination and astrology, the operation of divine providence and the possibility of demonic possession (Thomas 1971; Wilson 2000). The mental construction of such beliefs affected intellectuals and peasantry alike in their understanding of how God and the devil operated in the world. Sorcery or demonic magic became associated with witchcraft by the end of the Middle Ages, and the Church and DEMONOLOGISTS came increasingly to attribute all magical acts to the agency of the devil. Those who were believed to have conspired with him were labelled witches and prosecuted as such. The sharp rise in prosecutions for witchcraft between the mid-sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries has long been a source of popular fascination and, in recent decades, has generated much historical debate. However, the fact that its perpetrators became a judicial target in the early modern period has proved difficult to explain. Theories encompass wider patterns of socio-economic, political, intellectual and cultural change as well as religious reform.

The rise in prosecutions

Although a widespread belief in the existence of witchcraft predated the early modern period, a notable intensification in prosecutions for it occurred during the century *c.* 1560–1660. However, early estimates of hundreds of thousands brought to trial across Europe have been exaggerated and are not sustained by recent research. In fact, isolated trials and executions, although more frequent than before, continued to be the norm in most countries. Exact figures are difficult to obtain because of the patchy survival of sources (not least because some were burned along with the condemned witch), but those trial records that do survive can be extremely detailed. Early estimates were extrapolated from the more sensational and exceptional cases which involved greater numbers (but perhaps only 10–20 per cent of the total), yet even the reassessed figures are shockingly high (one recent estimate being 110,000 prosecutions and 60,000 executions: Levack 1995, 25) for

a crime that most people now do not believe to be possible, let alone worthy of capital punishment.

The rise in prosecutions varied according to time and place and was dependent on a number of regional variables (Table 1; Figure IV.11). Some areas were prone to mass trials, principally parts of the Empire, especially the south-west, while in others these were much less common, as in France and England. The role of certain individuals, usually judges, in particular regions proved crucial in a number of instances, notably Matthew Hopkins in Essex in the 1640s and Nicolas Rémy in Franche Comté at the end of the sixteenth century (Rémy 1930). The differences in the intensity of prosecution between countries has led historians to downplay the notion of a European-wide panic. Spain, Italy and Russia all experienced only relatively brief and low-key prosecutions. In Spain and Italy this was undertaken by the Inquisition, which was more concerned with enforcing orthodoxy than locating diabolism and required a higher standard of proof than accusations of witchcraft could provide. Salem was the only 'big' case in New England and, for all its notoriety, only resulted in nineteen executions in 1692.

England's apparent leniency has been explained by its peculiar legal system which treated witchcraft as a felony rather than a heresy (so that witches were hanged rather than burned as elsewhere) and forbade the use of torture, reducing the likelihood of confession and the incrimination of others which commonly lay behind mass convictions on the Continent (Macfarlane 1978). The contrast with Scotland, with its Continental-style use of ROMAN LAW, interrogation and torture (and greater number of prosecutions), supports this. Yet even in France, which is often contrasted with England, remarkable restraint was exercised by the judges of the leading sovereign court, the *Parlement* of Paris, which had jurisdiction over much of France. It was in

Table 1 Percentage of defendants at witchcraft trials actually executed

Location	Executed
Pays de Vaud	90%
Imperial Free Cities	<50%
Channel Islands	46%
Poland (1701–50)	46%
Moscow (17th century)	32%
Essex	26%
Geneva	21%
Poland (16th century)	4%

This table illustrates both the national variation but also the general pattern of 40–50 per cent of accused witches executed. Note the contrast between sixteenth- and eighteenth-century Poland (Scarre 1987, 30).

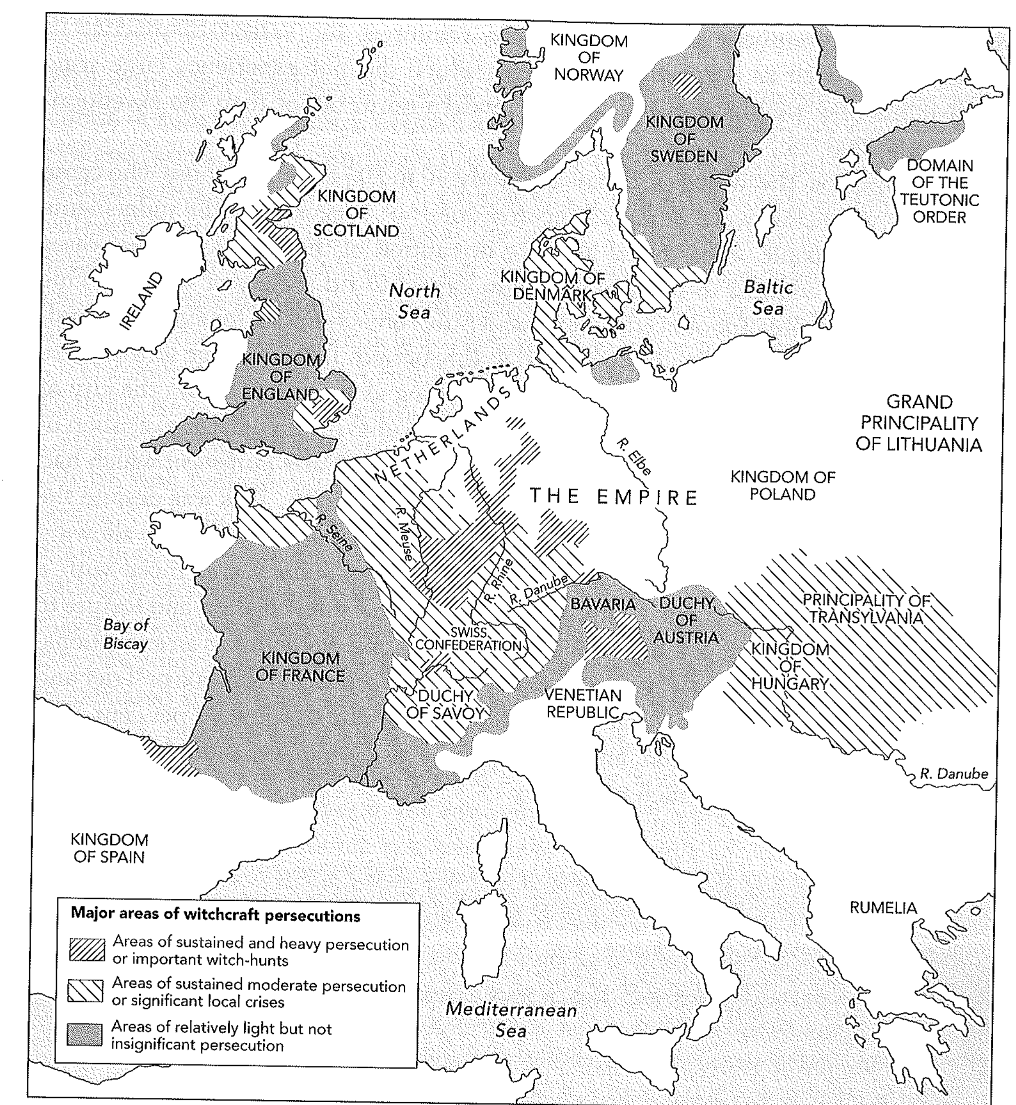

Figure IV.11. Major areas of witchcraft persecution in early modern Europe. The map clearly shows the variegated intensity of prosecutions. The densest were concentrated in pockets of the Holy Roman Empire, Scotland and the Swiss Confederation. It also suggests that the English rate of prosecution was far from unique, being on a par with that in France, Austria and Sweden. Briggs 1996, xi.

the borderlands of Lorraine and Franche Comté (only incorporated into the kingdom under Louis XIV), Normandy, the Pyrenees and the far north-east, unstable and further away from central control, that the number of executions was significant. The sensational cases of possessed convents, such as Loudun in the 1630s, were again exceptional. The restraint of judicial processes in parts of Germany, notably

Rothenburg, Nuremberg and the Palatinate, reinforces the variety of practice in the Empire as well as suggesting that 'areas which did not experience large-scale witch-hunts may well have been the early modern norm rather than the exception' (Rowlands 2003, 2).

Across Europe, the average estimate that only 40 to 50 per cent of those who came to trial for witchcraft were actually executed does not suggest that the judgements were driven by panic. Indeed, the leniency or caution of the judges in these cases is impressive in contrast to the zeal we might expect to rid society of witches. This contrast is even more pronounced if we consider the conviction rate for similar 'moral' crimes which were increasingly prosecuted in this period. In percentage terms, there were twice as many convictions for plague-spreading as for witchcraft in the city of Geneva. Infanticide (an almost exclusively 'female' crime) resulted in the execution of the vast majority of those accused; 70 per cent before the Paris *Parlement* which had only a 20 per cent conviction rate for witchcraft (Soman 1978). This was despite the fact that every effort was made to load the case against accused witches by allowing the usually inadmissible testimony of women, children, felons and those with a vested interest in the outcome. Combined with the use of interrogation and torture to extract confessions, such practices underline the status of witchcraft as an exceptional crime. In places where prosecution was more intense, such as in Lorraine or Trier and Würzburg in Germany, mass trials led to a conviction rate of some 90 per cent. The sporadic pattern of prosecution, and the very real fear of witches, should not detract from the tragic outcome of such trials (Box 1).

Box 1

Two typical cases brought to trial:

1. In 1587 in the town of Rothenburg, an imperial city in south-central Germany, a six-year-old boy and his mother were brought before the courts to answer claims that they had flown at night to a witches' dance with a 'black, horned man'. Despite the fact that he was below the age when his testimony was supposed to be credible, the boy Hans was the main focus of the interrogation, but inconsistencies in his story led the judges to dismiss the case (although not before the accused had been subjected to torture) (Rowlands 2003, 81–101).
2. In 1596 in the Duchy of Lorraine, on the imperial border with France, a woman claimed that another, with whom she had a long-running enmity, had sent her a poisoned pear via her husband. When the fruit turned black and was found to be full of grease, she threw it into a field where a sow and her piglets ate it and all soon died (Briggs 1996, 114).

The involvement of children was not unusual, nor was the leniency of judges even in southern Germany. Poison by (diabolically procured) grease or powder was a common, almost mundane accusation. Neither case suggests the traditional depiction of a witch-hunt or craze of panic proportions resulting in mass executions.

Explanations

Historians have sought to rationalize the actions of those responsible for the prosecution of supposed witches, both accusers and judges, and to explain the remarkable rise and just as rapid decline in that prosecution in the context of early modern beliefs and circumstances. Some relate it to centralization processes (state building) and the authorities' quest for greater social discipline. The most prominent explanations, however, encompass religious fervour, reactions to disaster and crises, the refusal of charity, changes in the legal system, a heightened awareness of the devil's agency, an alliance of elite and popular beliefs, misogyny and regional difference.

The coincidence, more or less, of the rise in prosecutions with the Protestant and Catholic Reformations is worthy of note. However, this was not so much because Catholics accused Protestants and vice versa in an outburst of confessional hostility, but because both movements encouraged the condemnation of witchcraft as a sin against God and Christian society (although this view predated the CONFESSIONAL age). Since it was generally held to be impossible to acquire supernatural powers by natural means, it was logical to assume that the devil was involved in all forms of magic, however benign, as outlined in the Bible (Clark 1997). Popular acceptance of this viewpoint was nevertheless far from assured. It is a paradox that the Reformations perpetuated superstitions which they condemned in the context of the suppression of popular religious beliefs and practices. For contemporary scholars, the apparent increase in diabolical activity appeared to presage, and was explained by, the Last Days as foretold in Revelation. Interestingly, increased reports of werewolf sightings and other forms of demonic possession and shape-shifting occurred in the same period, suggesting a wider anxiety about the present danger posed by the devil.

A rise in prosecution rarely seems to have responded to a particular catastrophe; indeed, some argue that a lack of crisis was more conducive, when authorities were not otherwise distracted by war or famine. Europe had been through worse with the Black Death and subsequent epidemics in the fourteenth century. Wider socio-economic difficulties throughout the period probably provide better grounds because of the instability they brought; however, the areas most affected were not necessarily those which experienced the highest rate of witchcraft trials. The coincidence of accusations of 'weather magic' in Central Europe with a prolonged drop in temperature, labelled by historians the 'Little Ice Age', is more substantive (Behringer 1995). The conjuring of hailstorms in particular threatened crops and, therefore, the welfare of the community. There is a correlation here too with the association of the witch with sterility, whether human or agrarian, going against the natural (particularly female) instinct to nurture (Roper 1994). The inversion of societal norms was a common motif in witchcraft accusations: the individuals concerned overturned the moral and spiritual order as well as expectations of neighbourliness.

Several historians have argued for the importance of neighbourly relations in accusations (Thomas 1971; Briggs 1996). They assert that worsening economic

circumstances made people more reluctant to give to the poor who were increasingly perceived as a threat and a problem ('Marginals and Deviants' in Part II). Furthermore, a decline in almsgiving accompanied the institutionalization of poor relief which exonerated individuals of responsibility. However, the refusal of charity led to resentment and ill-feeling and in turn to the guilt of those who turned the needy away. Any subsequent misfortune could then be attributed to the malice of the offended party, leading to an accusation of witchcraft (and the assuaging of guilt). The malicious acts thus procured were known as MALEFICIA and – as practical proofs that witchcraft had taken place – were lent great weight by the people and the judges. Witchcraft provided both an explanation and a remedy (through counter magic or trial) for the misfortunes people experienced, and therefore such accusations constituted both a rational and a reasonable response in their own terms. It was personal interactions within local communities which led to accusations, which may reflect a growing unease and insecurity at a time when antagonisms were increasing and customary bonds were breaking down.

Greater centralization of the legal system in territories such as the Empire and France may have eased the process of accusation and prosecution by removing the penalty for bringing a wrongful case, opening up the system for those who wanted to bring suspect witches to account. The reinvigoration of Roman law in much of Europe was central to the process of witchcraft investigation (Levack 1995). Recourse to the law became a substitute for local grievance solving. Again, though, it is worth emphasizing that prosecutions were not lightly brought. Judges required a number of witnesses to support the accuser and a substantial case history of misdemeanours. This explains why many of the accused were relatively old, having built up a reputation over a lifetime (Briggs 1996). Communities often preferred to wait until other avenues had been explored before bringing outsiders in, disliking external interference, the costs of litigation and the local rifts which a prosecution could cause. Possible retribution from the accused's relatives (or the accused themselves) if the prosecution failed was a further deterrent, a fear firmly wedded to the belief in the supernatural powers of the supposed witch. But it was not only the people who embraced the reality of witchcraft; so too did the elite, the intellectuals and judges who were the driving force behind the prosecution.

Demonology rose to prominence in the fifteenth century and was propagated via a number of printed pamphlets and tracts. The widely distributed *Malleus Maleficarum* of 1486 (Krämer and Sprenger 2007; Web resources), written by two Dominican inquisitors, established the standard checklist of witch stereotypes, particularly the association with women and their diabolical (often sexual but always blasphemous) pact with Satan. The advent of print assisted the widespread dissemination of these and other ideas ('From Pen to Print' in Part IV). Witches were depicted as enemies of society who needed to be destroyed, and who met together to indulge in unspeakable acts: denigrating the host, eating babies, copulating with the devil and rendering men impotent. By prosecuting them, judges were believed to be saving not only society but

also the soul of the accused if they were prepared to confess and repent. It is indeed remarkable how often the accused came to believe in their own guilt (occasionally thanking the judges for their concern) and produced elaborate confessions, even when a minimal amount or no torture at all was used. Such admissions in turn reinforced the belief of the judges in the justice of what they were doing, and reveal a shared culture or mental world between popular and elite.

Although the diabolical pact was high on the intellectual agenda (whereas accusers tended to focus on *maleficia*), in practice there was more overlap between popular and elite attitudes than this suggests. Judges lent great weight to the harmful acts of which the witch was accused in making their judgements, alongside the location of the devil's mark as 'proof' that a pact had been made. Popular beliefs also contained some elements of diabolical involvement, as accused witches confessed to encounters with dark strangers, attendance at SABBATS and plotting the downfall of their enemies (Figure IV.12). The extent to which elite diabolism was grafted onto the popular imagination as a result of suggestive questioning during trials, as some historians have suggested, is uncertain.

Should prosecutions be interpreted as a war on women? An estimated 80 per cent of those accused of witchcraft were women, which has been equated to a hate

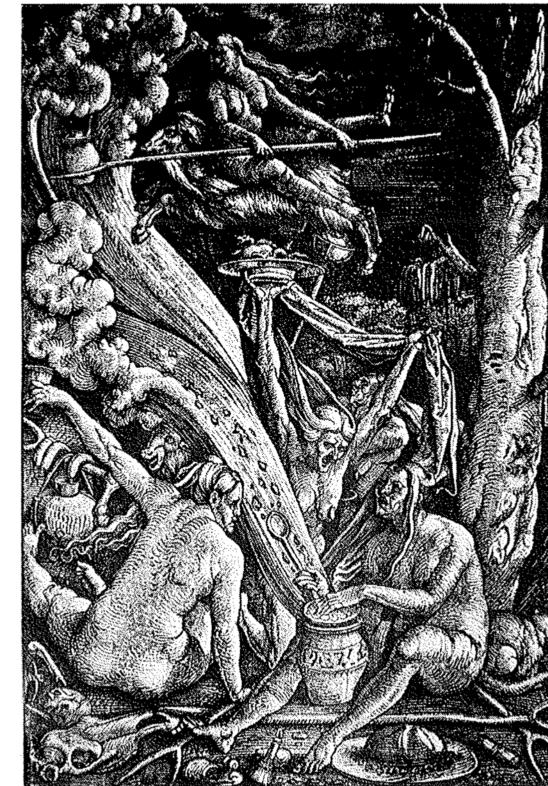

Figure IV.12. This graphic depiction of a sabbat includes various themes relating to diabolical witchcraft: unbridled sexuality (female nakedness, presence of a goat, phallic objects); sorcery (preparation of a potion, flight); and inversion (sitting backwards, female sexual dominance, unnatural practices). After Hans Baldung Grien, 'The Witches at the Sabbath' (1510).

campaign by an increasingly misogynistic and patriarchal society (Table 2). However, the remaining 20 per cent indicates that this was a gender-related rather than gender-specific offence, and there were fluctuations (Larner 1984). In some areas, such as Normandy and Russia, the majority of those convicted were men and, in general, men were more likely to be executed if accused (Apps and Gow 2003). Furthermore, many of the witnesses who testified against female witches were women, and the sporadic nature of the prosecutions makes a coordinated campaign to target women implausible. Nevertheless, the imbalance remains and needs to be explained. The general consensus is that women were disproportionately associated with witchcraft because of traditional perceptions of their susceptibility to sexual temptation, inconstancy, gullibility and deceitfulness. In a world governed by polarities, women were automatically correlated with these negative traits (Clark 1997). The predominantly female domestic roles of childrearing, treating the sick and food preparation also made them suspect when people, especially children, or livestock fell ill or died (circumstances which were at the centre of many witchcraft denunciations). It may be that some women resorted to magic in order to acquire power, to pretend to a status within the community otherwise denied them; to make themselves feared. If so, socio-economic circumstances probably drove them to it. A declining economic situation meant that single women struggled to survive, becoming more reliant on communal support and increasingly marginalized (the category most associated with, though not necessarily the most typical of, those accused of witchcraft).

In Cambrésis those making the accusations were people of property and status who targeted the poor and defenceless in their community. However, most historians have found that the accusers were often of a similar status to those they accused, and that accusations served as a marginalizing device. Only occasionally did scares lead to mass prosecutions affecting groups throughout society, even reaching as far as the judges themselves and territorial rulers in Germany in the early seventeenth century (as at Würzburg in 1629).

Table 2 The proportion of women among defendants at witchcraft trials

Location	Women tried
Basel	95%
Essex	92%
South-west Germany	82%
Venice (Inquisition)	78%
Geneva	76%
Castile (Inquisition)	71%
Freiburg (Switzerland)	64%
Moscow (17th century)	33%

This table shows how characteristic it was, with few exceptions, for defendants at trials to be female (Scarre 1987, 25).

Reasons for the decline in prosecutions

Explanations for the decline in prosecutions ought to respond to these arguments, reflecting change as well as new developments. The initiative for the decline as well as the rise is attributed to the judges, the elite, for their actions were decisive in bringing legal prosecution to an end. For the people the 'reality' of witchcraft continued to function much as before as an everyday hazard within their communities. Key factors were the triumph of scepticism and changing circumstances.

The elite fascination with witchcraft is reflected in the writings of famous people of the day, from the political theorist Jean Bodin in his *Démonomanie des sorciers* (1580: Web resources) and James VI and I of Scotland and England in his *Daemonologie* (1597). Like Bodin, James initially advocated the harshest punishment for witches, but later became renowned for his scepticism and refutation of judicial prosecution. Sixteenth-century authors Michel de Montaigne, Reginald Scot and Johann Weyer were in the minority in upholding a consistently sceptical approach: 'After all, it is to put a very high value on your surmises to roast a man alive for them' (Montaigne 1987, 1169). Weyer concluded that the devil was more than capable of undertaking acts of *maleficia* without human agency and claimed that diabolical influence lay behind the accusations of witchcraft (Weyer 1991). Only gradually would such views gain ascendancy. The early Enlightenment's encouragement of a more rational, less fearful view of the world (and the potential of evil forces within it) provided a coherent intellectual context for increased scepticism. This was confirmed by the increasing diagnoses of accused witches, and those who claimed that they were possessed as a result of their magic, as mentally unstable and confused individuals. Thus, we might conclude that judges ceased to believe in witchcraft, that it became an impossible crime.

However, it was not necessarily the case that judges no longer accepted the influence of the devil and the reality of witchcraft; in fact, there is plenty of evidence that they continued to do so. Their increasing scepticism was instead related to their ability to prove the guilt of those accused and a judgement that it was better not to condemn the innocent. This trend is revealed in the policies of the courts. The *Parlement* of Paris, for instance, introduced the automatic appeal of all witchcraft cases from the French provinces in 1624, so that it could keep a check on lesser courts' activities, and in 1640 forbade the prosecution of witchcraft cases altogether (a position not officially decreed by the crown until 1682). The revelation of abuses and abusers within the system, and growing concerns about the use of torture, led to such reconsiderations of the judicial position on witchcraft. Practical experience thus played a major part in persuading the elite that witchcraft prosecution was not an effective means of justice or for dealing with the forces of evil. Judgement of such individuals was to be left to God.

The encouragement of denunciations in fact provided a greater opportunity for disorder, with popular justice being meted out to witches and occasional scares. So if the intention of the elites was to eliminate deviants in the interests of order and

conformity, prosecutions proved counter-productive. By the end of the seventeenth century, it is arguable anyway that the socio-economic crisis and other causes of instability had peaked and, thus, provided a less compelling context for accusations. Nevertheless, although in most parts of Europe prosecutions had fizzled out by the early eighteenth century, in Poland they intensified.

Assessment

The rise in the prosecution of witches in early modern Europe was the result of growing concerns about order and conformity which targeted non-Christian and disruptive elements. Socio-economic crisis resulted in greater insecurity which led to the need to seek scapegoats by marginalizing certain individuals. This in turn fed on traditional misogyny and the popular belief in the battle between good and evil in the world. Intellectuals developed a coherent context for increased diabolical activity as a threat to society based on biblical exegesis. Judicial authorities provided accusers with the legal means and encouragement to bring accusations to the courts in the final resort, rather than sorting them out within, or expelling the offender from, the community. This resulted in elite interference in local tradition and custom which was enthusiastically embraced, producing a pattern of prosecution which was regional rather than national or international in character. Once judges withdrew their support because of increased scepticism and concerns that prosecutions were not serving their intended purpose, they ceased. Witchcraft accusations, therefore, provide an interesting example of the overlap of popular and elite attitudes working together in a common cause for more than a century. Witchcraft prosecutions were, therefore, far from an aberration in terms of the prevailing beliefs, both intellectual and popular, of their day, and have a great deal to tell us about the early modern worldview.

Discussion themes

1. Does regional variation make it impossible to generalize about reasons for the rise in European witchcraft prosecutions?
2. Were the European witch-hunts primarily a war against women?
3. Why did the legal pursuit of witches seem to make less sense in 1720 than in 1500?

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Popular Culture(s)

Bernard Capp

Introduction

In January 1525 a dozen youths roamed through the streets of Boersch, in Alsace, with a drummer and piper, knocking on doors and demanding money and food for their 'king'. It was a traditional, festive custom. But when the canons of St Leonhard's turned them away empty-handed, the youths became abusive, threatening revenge. Several weeks later, at Easter, a large crowd sacked the foundation and destroyed its images. Some defecated on the altar while others poked fun at religious ceremonies in an impromptu mummers' play (Scribner 1987, 75–6). The episode illustrates well the ambivalent nature of many popular traditions, and the uneasy relationship between the popular and elite worlds.

Definitions and debates

'Popular culture' is a problematic term, and both of its components have provoked heated debate. In this chapter it is taken to denote those beliefs, values, customs and practices that were distinct from the culture of the 'elite' or 'learned' minority. We should recognize, however, that many important features of early modern culture were shared by most people at every social level. Catholic kings and peasants alike venerated saints and visited shrines. Aristocrats and peasants held broadly similar views on gender relations and accepted a broadly hierarchical view of the political and social order. Courtiers and artisans together thronged the playhouses of Elizabethan and Jacobean London and together enjoyed the crude pleasures of the cock-fight and bear- and bull-baiting. Cultural divisions certainly existed within every society and so, increasingly, did cultural conflict, with repeated attempts by the Church and state to reform or suppress popular practices and beliefs deemed profane, disorderly or superstitious. But we should also be sensitive to overlap and exchange, in both directions, between different cultural worlds.

Two influential studies published in the 1970s, by Robert Muchembled and Peter Burke, painted a sharp binary division between elite and popular culture. Muchembled described a process of ACCULTURATION in France, an alliance between the Catholic Reformation Church and the state to strengthen their control by rooting out profane and superstitious customs and imposing the culture of the elite upon the whole population. The reformers sought to eradicate the 'folkloric' elements of traditional

Catholicism, reform the parish clergy and place local religious confraternities under firm control (Muchembled 1985). Peter Burke, surveying the whole of Europe in a pioneering and influential work, offered a rather different picture. Burke posited a medieval culture that had embraced the whole of society, except a tiny handful of learned schoolmen or theologians. During the early modern period, by contrast, the elites gradually withdrew from much of this traditional world, a process encouraged in different ways by Renaissance humanism, the Protestant and Catholic Reformations, and the Enlightenment. The Renaissance and Enlightenment promoted the values of reason and civility, or politeness, and all waged war on 'superstition', disorder and excess ('The Renaissance' and 'Enlightenment' in Part IV). Religious reformers sought to improve clerical standards and separate the sacred world from the profane; Catholics wanted to ban rowdy festivities from the church and churchyard, while Calvinists tried to suppress them altogether. Burke presented these developments as a war between 'Carnival' and LENT, Carnival standing for the rough, earthy and boisterous celebration of life and the senses, Lent for the new values of civility, restraint and discipline – a war that ended with the triumph of Lent (Burke 1978).

In recent years many scholars have questioned such a stark binary division, stressing instead cultural continuities, interaction and diversity. Instead of viewing cultural change simply in terms of acceptance or resistance, Roger Chartier has emphasized the need to see how each element was used, understood and 'appropriated' by different communities (Chartier 1987). The cult of saints continued to flourish in Catholic lands, if now more closely supervised. In Lutheran Germany, where saints disappeared, the figure of Luther himself took on some of their attributes, with stories telling how his picture had remained unharmed by fire, sweated blood or tears, and even worked miracles. Moreover, such reports were fostered by educated clerics, realizing perhaps that they needed to work within the grain of traditional beliefs rather than trying to destroy them (Scribner 1987, 323–53). In England, where the intervention of saints in people's daily lives was also swept away, a belief in God's PROVIDENTIAL direction of human affairs took its place, reflected in the widespread conviction that God rewarded virtue and punished the wicked in this life as well as the next. Such developments have led historians to speak increasingly of 'post-Reformation' rather than 'Protestant' beliefs ('The Long Reformation' in Part III). For their part, Puritan ministers complained bitterly about what they dismissed as the 'country divinity' of most villagers, who after endless sermons still failed or refused to absorb the doctrine of salvation by faith alone, and remained convinced that heaven was a reward for all who lived a decent life. Lutheran ministers made similar complaints, and Catholic missionaries in the more remote parts of France, Spain and Italy found the peasantry equally resistant to new Catholic Reformation teaching. We should not conclude, however, that ordinary folk were always passive or traditionalist in their thinking. The Italian miller Menocchio drew on his limited reading and fertile imagination to devise a new cosmology, which eventually brought him to the stake (Ginzburg 1992; Box 1).

Many other men and women fashioned personal beliefs from the mélange of religious ideas in circulation, especially in Reformation Germany and revolutionary England.

Box 1

'When man dies he is like an animal, like a fly, and ... his soul and everything about him also dies.' - Menocchio

'He is always arguing with somebody about the faith just for the sake of arguing – even with the priest.' - A neighbour on Menocchio.

(Ginzburg 1992, 2, 69)

The Italian miller Menocchio (burned at the stake 1599/1600) reminds us that unlearned people could also think for themselves, though not without risk.

Popular culture – or cultures?

While Burke stressed the conceptual value of an elite/popular division, he also acknowledged and explored the diversity of popular cultures or subcultures, a theme which almost all historians now emphasize. In very broad terms we can distinguish between a Southern European culture, centred on the outdoor world of processions and parades, and with tight restrictions on women's freedom, and the more indoor, less exuberant culture of the north. We can also distinguish between rural and urban cultures (and between the rural cultures of mountainous or pastoral regions and those of the arable plains). Urban culture developed its own character, focused on the guilds and associations of journeymen and apprentices. Beyond that, many occupational groups developed their own subcultures and language, most strikingly in the case of sailors and soldiers. All that suggests we would often do better to speak of 'cultures' in the plural.

Other historians have pointed to distinctive cultural traits found among the so-called 'middling sorts' – merchants, professional men and increasingly substantial farmers (English yeomen and French *laboureurs*) (Barry and Brooks 1994). Such groups cannot easily be labelled either 'elite' or 'popular', neither can we simply place them at some point between the two. The values of sobriety, moral rigour and hard work appealed more readily to the merchant or lawyer, for example, than to the often quarrelsome and spendthrift nobility. Proverbial sayings such as 'drunk as a Lord' and 'to swear like a Lord' suggest that respectable, middling-sort culture might stand equally distant from the worlds of both the disorderly poor and the profligate rich.

Most scholars have agreed with Burke in stressing the importance of cultural interchange, with some features (such as chivalric tales) descending from the elite to the popular and others (dances and songs) moving in the opposite direction. In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the aristocratic Ophelia sings snatches from popular songs, while the French writer Rabelais wove popular tales into his comic epic *Gargantua*.

Orality and print

Most people were illiterate in 1500, and literacy rates improved only slowly, especially in Southern Europe and among women. For centuries the cultural world of the majority rested on the spoken word. The young picked up skills from their parents or employers and absorbed values and beliefs, both secular and religious, from what they saw and heard in the home, at church and in the street. Inevitably the invention of print brought changes ('From Pen to Print' in Part IV). First in Germany and then throughout Western Europe, the printing presses generated books, short pamphlets, cartoons and ballads in ever increasing numbers. Many were illustrated with woodcuts, which reinforced the message and made print more accessible to unlearned readers. Ballads, set out in simple verse and designed to be sung to popular tunes, were a multimedia form, combining print, image and music. The spread of print encouraged greater literacy, especially in North-western Europe, which in turn further stimulated the growth of the press. Oral communication remained fundamental, of course, and printing did not necessarily pose a threat to the old order. Very often censorship and market forces persuaded publishers to issue material that was safe and traditional. Many of the early best-sellers were deeply conservative works like *The Golden Legend*, stories of saints' lives and miracles. The *bibliothèque bleue*, the popular fare which flourished in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France, was almost wholly conventional, much of it focused on popular piety or stories of legendary heroes such as *Pierre of Provence* or *The Four Sons of Aymon*. Most of the black-letter ballads and chapbooks that flourished in England were equally conservative. Ballads told of royal coronations, love stories, drunken revelries, murder, monsters and adventures at sea. Many chapbooks, short and simple prose works, resembled the French material, while astrological almanacs (calendars with other information and lore related to the stars) were also generally bland, as in France – until the English Revolution. But from the 1640s English almanacs took on a very different character, offering rival political, religious and social views that reflected the divisions within society and encouraged a wider political awareness. That sudden shift reminds us of print's radical potential, even if it was one only occasionally realized. Something similar had happened much earlier in Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland: pamphlets, many with scabrous woodcuts, played a vital role in spreading the Protestant message in the 1520s and undermining the authority of the Catholic Church. The spread and success of the Protestant Reformation owed much to a powerful alliance between powerful preachers and pamphleteers ('The Long Reformation: Lutheran' in Part III). Similarly the radical movements in mid-seventeenth-century England, and the Parisian *Frondes,* would have been impossible without a large reading public ready to devour cheap pamphlets, newspapers and satirical verses. John Bunyan, the radical sectarian whose visionary *Pilgrim's Progress* was to remain a best-seller for two centuries, embodies the transforming potential of print; his story-telling flair had developed from the chapbook adventures he had loved as a child. But Bunyan also complained that many adults continued to prefer simple ballads and chapbooks to the Bible and other more serious publications.

The English antiquarian John Aubrey, writing in the late seventeenth century, thought that print had almost driven out the world of folk tradition. He was exaggerating. Adam Fox has shown how the relation between orality and print was far more complex. Very often an 'oral tradition' can be shown to have originated in some printed ballad or story; sometimes the process went in the other direction; and sometimes stories or songs moved to and fro between the oral and written traditions (Fox 2000). Moreover, readers might appropriate printed texts for their own use, as when the Derbyshire yeoman Leonard Wheatcroft drew on printed verse-miscellanies to woo his future wife (Houlbrooke 1986, 15, 55–60, 68–70). Print could enrich as well as undermine traditional oral culture.

Popular sociability

How did popular ideas and values find expression in social behaviour? To answer that we must enter the alehouse and tavern, where men (and less often women) gathered to drink, play games, talk, gossip, sing, gamble and tell jokes (Kümin and Tlusty 2002). In Germany and France women gathered at the well or washing-place and also in evening 'spinning-bees' devoted to work and gossip. Everywhere we find the working year punctuated by holiday festivities. In 1500 the church was at the heart of this popular sociability, centred on the Christian year and the celebration of the local patron saint, with processions and feasting. This tradition survived, especially in Catholic lands, alongside more secular festivities characterized by singing, dancing, feasting, sports and drinking. All these activities had an appeal across the whole social range, though there were clear social as well as geographical features; thus football, popular in England from medieval times, was always primarily a plebeian sport. In Southern and Central Europe, the festival world revolved around carnivals, which in Venice and many other cities featured huge, rowdy processions with men and women in costume or cross-dressed, heaping abuse on magistrates and bishops, singing bawdy songs, feasting and drinking. It was a period of semi-licensed and often violent disorder, a world turned briefly upside down. Whether carnivals helped preserve social hierarchy, by providing an outlet for popular resentments (the 'safety-valve' theory), or threatened it, remains debatable and perhaps unanswerable. For carnival was an ambivalent occasion, viewed nervously by magistrates who recognized how easily festive disorder might spill over into serious violence. Occasionally that happened, most notably in the French town of Romans in 1580, when local elites interpreted festive licence as a serious threat and responded by massacring the revellers (Le Roy Ladurie 1980). Earlier, over twenty German carnivals in the 1520s and 1530s had turned into anti-Catholic parades, reflecting and helping to promote the advance of early Lutheran movements (Scribner 1987, 71–102).

Popular political culture

Despite occasional outbursts, most ordinary people throughout Europe appear to have broadly accepted the traditional political order. The accession day of England's Queen Elizabeth was still celebrated long after her death. The execution of Charles I was deeply unpopular, and in the 1650s all parties acknowledged that a free popular vote would quickly restore the monarchy. Charles II's return in 1660 sparked such frenzied excess that the king himself had to urge restraint. In France, Henry IV became a popular folk-hero, and when Queen Christina of Sweden announced her decision to abdicate in 1654, the Marshal of the Peasants' Estate in the *Riksdag* made an emotional plea for her to reconsider. It would be wrong, however, to see popular political culture wholly in terms of deference and loyalty. Parish officers, bailiffs and tax officials often faced abuse and physical violence from ordinary men and women, and magistrates too encountered scornful defiance. Elizabeth Smith, who ran a London brothel, told a magistrate bluntly in 1653 that 'she did not care a fart for never a justice in England' (London Metropolitan Archives, MJ/SR/1108/160).

More important than truculent individuals was the widespread belief that rulers had obligations towards the common people, as well as rights over them ('Centre and Periphery' in Part V). This deep-rooted concept of reciprocal obligations should not really surprise us, for it also underpinned ideas about family life and religion too; most Christians worshipped God in the hope of rewards in this life or the next, ideally both. In the political sphere, this mentality helped trigger petitions and protests over

Figure IV.13. Hudibras, a Puritan, is shocked to encounter a rowdy procession, with an unruly woman beating her feeble husband who sits behind her spinning (i.e. doing women's work). Note the 'rough music', and the petticoat and smock carried as trophies. The couple at the window are probably the targets of this ritual humiliation. William Hogarth, 'Hudibras Encounters the Skimmington', originally published in Butler 1726.

changes to land usage, such as enclosures and fen drainage, or food supplies. A 'bread riot' might occur in England or France after a poor harvest, when local people saw grain being carried away to be sold abroad or in some distant city. The rioters would stay the grain, demanding that it be sold locally. They were also trying to force local magistrates to intervene, using the riot to remind them that they were failing in their duty. Very often the move succeeded, for though magistrates might briefly arrest a few leading rioters, they generally took the remedial action the protesters had demanded. Similarly in enclosure riots, the protesters believed they had a moral and legal right to defend traditional rights of access to common lands and were sometimes eager to see the issue brought before a law court. If that did not happen, they might wear the landlord down by tearing up hedges and fences faster than he could replace them, forcing him to abandon the project or compromise. Women often played a prominent part in such episodes, which made it easier for magistrates to agree to the demands without losing face. To give way to a crowd of armed men would look like weakness, whereas accepting women's demands could be presented as Christian compassion. But tolerance went only so far. Magistrates responded positively to the demands of Ann Carter, who led a grain riot at Maldon (Essex) in March 1629, but when she led another, larger and more threatening riot in May that year she was promptly arrested, tried and hanged (Thompson 1991, 185–351; Walter 2006, 14–66).

This sense of the community's right to intervene when magistrates had failed to act can be found in many other contexts throughout Europe. It underpinned the protests in Germany at the demands of oppressive landlords, which swelled into the great Peasants' War of 1525 ('Rebels and Revolutionaries' in Part V). It is evident too in the apprentices' Shrovetide riots in early Stuart London, which generally took bawdy-houses as their targets. While the rioters enjoyed their festive violence, they could point to bawdy-houses as scandalous places which the magistrates themselves should have suppressed. This kind of 'community justice' can be seen too in the ritual punishment of those breaching accepted social behaviour, as in the French CHARIVARI or English SKIMMINGTON. The usual targets were wives who beat their husbands and remarrying widows or widowers. In France such rituals were often organized by village youth groups or urban 'Abbeys of Misrule' (twenty in sixteenth-century Lyon alone), with their own officials and structures. Thus a woman who beat her husband might find a crowd of young men parading outside her house, banging pots and pans ('rough music'), with figures facing backwards on an ass to represent the offending couple (Davis 1975, 97–123; Ingram 1984, 79–113; Figure IV.13 and Box 2).

Such rituals were designed to shame or frighten victims into more appropriate behaviour, but there was always the risk that they would degenerate into serious violence, as occasionally happened. Like attacks on bawdy-houses, these shaming rituals symbolized a public cleansing or purification, and this feature was even more evident in the religious riots of sixteenth-century France. Catholics and Calvinists both accused the rival community of polluting society and religion, blaming magistrates for their failure to act. Local people, many of them youths or mere boys,

Box 2

'[300–400 men came one day] some like soldiers ... and a man riding upon a horse, having a white night cap upon his head, two shoeing horns hanging by his ears, a counterfeit beard upon his chin made of a deer's tail ... [and outside the victims' house] the gunners shot off their pieces, pipes and horns were sounded, together with lowbells and other smaller bells, ... and rams' horns and bucks' horns, carried upon forks, were then and there lifted up and shown.'

(Ingram 1984, 82)

A skimmington, with 'rough music' at Quemerford, near Calne, Wiltshire, in 1618. The main target, Agnes Mills, was beaten up as well as humiliated.

accordingly took on the task themselves, with Calvinists destroying and desecrating holy objects and Catholics killing and mutilating the 'polluters' themselves (Davis 1975, 152–87). French riots over bread supplies were about retribution, the verbal or physical humiliation of those held responsible, as much as about securing access to the grain (Beik 2007, 78–94).

Change over time

Cultures are always evolving, both internally and in response to outside pressures and influences. Thus by the mid-eighteenth century, 'rough music' in England was often directed at men who beat their wives, rather than vice versa, a reflection of changing values. While change often came slowly, especially in more remote rural areas, the popular cultural world of 1800 differed considerably from that of 1500. Belief in astrology, witchcraft and magic, for example, formed part of the shared culture of the sixteenth century; by 1750 such beliefs had been abandoned by the elite and the middling sort, surviving only as a strand of popular culture, especially among women. Religion itself exercised a weaker hold, at least in much of the Protestant north. As church attendance dropped, ministers complained that Sundays and religious festivals were treated simply as holidays. We should not exaggerate such trends, however; religion maintained its grip in much of Southern Europe, and even in the north new movements such as Methodism proved that the religious spirit remained very much alive ('Religious Culture' in Part III).

Finally, the spread of literacy and the huge growth in printed material of all kinds had brought another major cultural shift. Printed ballads, chapbooks and almanacs constituted a print culture that was commercially driven, a 'mass culture' rather than one genuinely 'popular'. Such had been the case ever since printing began, of course, and it is worth noting that this market was highly sensitive to consumer choice; people bought only what they liked. Even in France, where most popular literature was blandly conservative, the eighteenth century saw the emergence of many 'forbidden best-sellers' – illicit pieces, either politically subversive or sexually explicit. Print helped to make possible the French Revolution – just as the popular 'culture of retribution', seen in earlier crowd violence, found new forms of expression in the violence of the Revolutionary era (Beik 2007, 94–110).

Discussion themes

1. Did changes in popular culture(s) over this period owe more to internal dynamics or to outside pressures?
2. 'Popular culture' or 'popular cultures'?
3. How far did the spread of print influence popular culture?

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Enlightenment

Colin Jones

What was 'Enlightenment'?

'Was ist Aufklärung?' ['What is Enlightenment?'] asked the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) in 1784 in a reply to an open enquiry launched by a Berlin newspaper. It was a rhetorical question: he had an answer. Enlightenment, his pamphlet stated, was 'man's release from his self-incurred immaturity'. For Kant, the prime agent of 'release' was human reason. 'If it is now asked whether we live in an *enlightened age*, the answer is: No. But we do live in an age of *enlightening*' (Eliot and Stern 1979, ii. 250, 253).

Kant's well-known opinion is valuable for highlighting key features of the intellectual and cultural movement in eighteenth-century Europe known as the Enlightenment. First, it was a phenomenon of which he and contemporaries were aware and which was a subject of public debate. It was not, in other words, a trivial issue; nor was it a subsequent invention by historians ('The Scientific Revolution' in Part IV). Second, the use of human reason to produce beneficial change lay at the heart of the movement. Third, enlightenment was a process rather than a finished good. Indeed, for Kant it was more than a process, it was a project still under way. He was well aware that established authority did not always like the answers that human reason produced. One needed moral courage as well as intellectual capacity in order to undertake the work of human enlightenment. The watchword for any 'enlightener' should be, Kant concluded, the Latin injunction *sapere aude* [dare to know!].

In this chapter, we shall use Kant's argument as the framework for understanding the European Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. We shall focus first on the notion of human reason as an agent of change, highlighting the development of scientific method as a means of understanding the world. We shall go on, in the second section, to discuss the social and intellectual ways in which individuals reasoned. Kant's discussion, for example, was carried in a newspaper, and the easy and open communication this exemplified was crucial to the Enlightenment process. In the third section, we shall examine the politics of enlightenment, noting some of the difficulties the Enlightenment faced, and why 'daring' was a key component in the enlightener's intellectual toolbox. Finally, in the concluding section, we shall examine some problems to do with Enlightenment – where 'daring' fell short of the mark, who was left out as well as who was included in the process, and who might have felt that the 'enlightening' process, far from representing human emancipation, was irrelevant or even repressive.

Figure IV.14. Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719–21) used a fictional account of shipwreck to explore key facets of human nature as well as humankind's relations with the natural world and exotic 'others'. It was translated into numerous European languages. *Histoire de Robinson Crusoé* (woodcut, Lille, c. 1810): Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée, Paris.

Throughout we shall focus on the intellectual, ideological, philosophical and scientific backbone of the movement within Europe. It is important to note that the Enlightenment also had powerful artistic and cultural dimensions. Enlightenment philosophers and scientists rubbed shoulders with composers such as Bach, Haydn and Mozart; painters such as Gainsborough, Constable, Reynolds, Hogarth, Boucher, Greuze, David, Friedrich and Goya; and poets such as Pope, Johnson, Gray, Goethe, Schiller, Wordsworth and Coleridge. In addition, we need to bear in mind that the movement transcended European frontiers. Enlightenment was to be found on the American continent, most notably in the British colonies to the north, but also in French, Hispanic and Dutch zones of influence. Enlightenment was evident too in the ongoing work of European discovery and exploration. The traveller's tale – which might be a scientific report on local flora and fauna, an account of a religious mission,

a utopian tale or the fictional setting for a novel – was a genre found at every level of the Enlightenment (Figure IV.14).

Reason and science

The notion of light embedded in the word Enlightenment is present in most European languages – German's *Aufklärung*, for example, is matched by the Italian *illuminismo*, while in French the Age of Enlightenment was *le siècle des lumières* ['the age of lights']. In all cases, the light was the light of human reason, figured as dispelling the forces of darkness (prejudice, superstition, ignorance, etc.). Human reason, it was held, operated through the scientific method pioneered in the previous century. Enlightenment thinkers eschewed A PRIORI (that is, derived from first principles) thinking, rejected scriptural revelation and valued inductive, empirical approaches. Their heroes were seventeenth-century English figures: arch-empiricists Francis Bacon (1561–1626) and John Locke (1632–1704) and, especially, Isaac Newton (1643–1727). Newton was the patron saint of Enlightenment. His law of gravity demonstrated reason's capacity for unlocking the secrets of the natural world. Post-Newton, the universe could be viewed more as a precise mechanism strictly observing general rules than as an unintelligible, divinely inspired mystery. The laudatory couplet by Alexander Pope (1688–1744), intended as Newton's epitaph in Westminster Abbey, caught the Enlightenment mood – and metaphor – exactly: 'Nature and nature's laws lay hid in night. God said, "Let Newton Be" and all was light' (1730).

The Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century had achieved breakthroughs in the 'hard sciences', notably astronomy (Galileo Galilei, Newton), chemistry (Robert Boyle), physics (Newton) and biology (William Harvey). This kind of research continued and prospered in the Enlightenment. The Swedish natural historian Linnaeus (1707–78), for example, devised modern botanical nomenclature, the comte de Buffon's (1707–88) *Natural History* was an impressive and enduring summation of the human and animal worlds, while in the 1780s Antoine Lavoisier (1743–94) and Joseph Priestley (1733–1804) effected a 'chemical revolution' with the discovery of oxygen and other gases. Yet what was also striking about the Enlightenment was the parallel effort to adapt scientific method for 'softer' forms of knowledge focused on the human rather than the natural world. Tellingly, the Enlightenment supplied many foundational figures in what became the social sciences – economics (François Quesnay, Adam Smith), linguistics (Jean-Jacques Rousseau), history (Giambattista Vico, Voltaire, William Robertson, Edward Gibbon), politics (Montesquieu, Rousseau, Edmund Burke – and the French Revolutionaries) and so on. The spirit of the age was opposed to excessive specialization. 'Enlighteners' saw themselves as all-round natural philosophers – the French term PHILOSOPHES was widely used – with a purview over all forms of knowledge.

The yardstick for the validity of reasoned knowledge was social utility and collective happiness. New knowledge was thus potential power – power to produce a

rational and therefore (it was thought) contented and prosperous world. Contributors to the great multi-volumed 'Bible of Enlightenment', the ENCYCLOPÉDIE, edited by Denis Diderot (1713–84) and Jean-le-Rond d'Alembert (1717–83), were aware of this stirring venture. Diderot claimed that the aim of the *philosophe* enterprise, as expressed through the *Encyclopédie* was to

> collect knowledge disseminated around the globe; to set forth its general system to the men with whom we live, and transmit it to those who will come after us, so that the work of preceding centuries will not become useless to the centuries to come; and so that our offspring, becoming better instructed, will at the same time become more virtuous and happy, and that we should not die without having rendered a service to the human race.
>
> (*Encyclopédie,* vol. 5, 636: Web resources)

Put this way, the Enlightenment was a secular mission dedicated to the improvement of humanity (Figure IV.15).

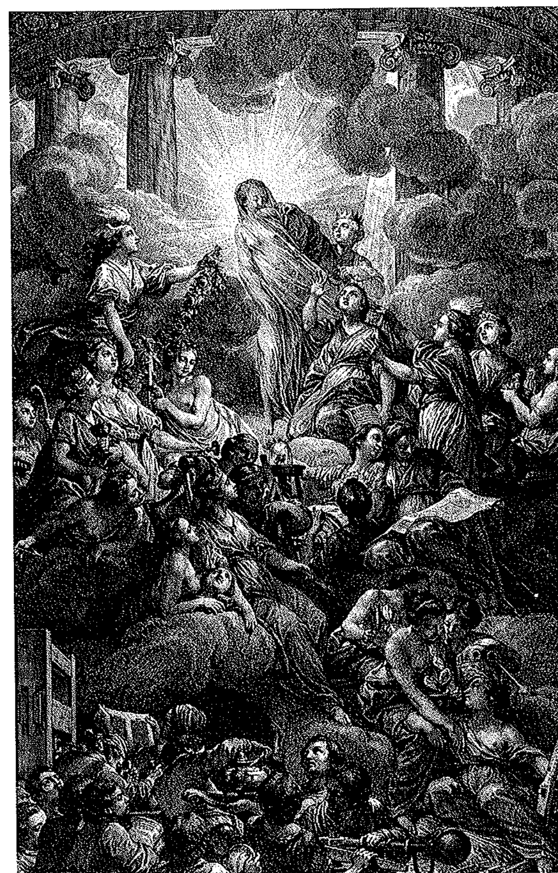

Figure IV.15. The frontispiece of the *Encyclopédie* utilized the foundational metaphor of Enlightenment so as to highlight the work's underlying mission. Crowned Reason and Philosophy unveil naked Truth, as the light of Reason pours through the receding clouds of ignorance and fanaticism.

Like the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment tended to be unpopular with the Churches. The Enlightenment narrative of progress, provocatively expressed by Edward Gibbon (1737–94), blamed the Church for crushing the Graeco-Roman heritage and blocking out the light of reason until the Renaissance. The Enlightenment campaigner Voltaire (1694–1778) used his famous watchword, *écrasez l'infâme* [crush infamy], most powerfully against ecclesiastical misuse of power – as with miscarriages of justice like the Calas Affair (1762–65), in which he orchestrated a European protest movement against the wrongful execution of a French Protestant. The *philosophes* were harder, however, on the Church than on God. Outright atheists had rarity value in the Enlightenment. Most scientists worked on the DEIST assumption that the universe was the work of a benevolent deity. Newtonians imagined a watch-maker god, who was content merely to observe the mechanical exactness of his creation. Later in the century, Rousseau (1712–78) attacked the watch-maker God idea, insisting on an intuitive sense of human rapture in the face of divine creation. But in most of Europe he was pushing at an open door: despite often strong reservations about the clergy, most individuals involved in the Enlightenment subscribed to a natural theology which sought to reconcile science and faith rather than prise them apart. The *Spectacle of Nature* by the Abbé Noel-Antoine Pluche (1688–1761), an immensely popular work of natural history, was grounded in a providentialist deity who offered the natural world to the human gaze as 'sugar-coated spectacle' (Stafford 1994, 234).

The public world of Enlightenment

The Enlightenment – like the *Encyclopédie* – was a collective venture. Seventeenth-century scientists producing knowledge which seemed to threaten the status quo – as, for example, Galileo's 'heretical' views on the cosmos – had been relatively isolated and could be picked off and silenced by established authorities. The Enlightenment, in contrast, was a group project and produced new knowledge as a social and interactive enterprise. The Royal Society in London (1660) and the Académie des Sciences in Paris (1666) provided the template for scientific sociability, establishing protocols of evidence, networks of information and methods of scientific legitimation ('Courts and Centres' in Part V). The academy style of group science was widely diffused throughout Europe, and as the century wore on widened its remit: by the 1780s, learned societies were as likely to be discussing the relief of poverty or hospital hygiene as devising chemical experiments or adding to botanical classifications.

No academy worth its salt was an island unto itself. Intra-institutional sociability was matched by inter-institutional exchange. Efficient and improving communications – another factor enjoyed by the Enlightenment but not the Scientific Revolution – provided its infrastructure. The findings of one academy could be transmitted swiftly to dozens of its peers – especially now that the postal service made correspondence an effective and everyday activity. Shorter journey times helped in this:

road improvement and canal-building were passions of the age, contributing to the notion of news as current affairs. Book production soared over the century, but readership grew even faster as a result of the emergence of a strong newspaper press, facilitated by improvements in literacy levels. The transformation of communications made the Enlightenment a 'virtual community' in some ways like the internet of the twenty-first century – albeit dependent not on digital technology but on the humbler methods of road and water transport.

Besides the scientific academy, the other two most characteristic forms of Enlightenment sociability and knowledge production were the SALON and the COFFEE HOUSE. Both were widespread throughout urban Europe, but were held to have their most brilliant incarnations in Paris, the city that prided itself on being the unofficial capital of the Enlightenment. This claim, though disputed, was supported by the development of the French language as the *lingua franca* of Enlightenment Europe (Mercier 1999). Salons, usually presided over by witty, intelligent women from wealthy backgrounds, brought together the (largely male) elites from the social, political, cultural and intellectual worlds, providing a forum for discussion grounded in an atmosphere of polite worldliness. Coffee houses were altogether more relaxed and informal. They highlighted how closely the world of intellectual exchange was linked to commercial exchange: tobacco, tea and sugar, alongside coffee, had once been exotic but were now everyday colonial products consumed there alongside newspapers, news, ideals, opinions, gossip and jokes (Ellis 2004; Box 1).

Box 1

'The fine Gentleman ... rises late, puts on a Frock ... and leaving his Sword at Home, ... goes ... to some Coffee-house, or Chocolate-house, frequented by the Person he would see; for 'tis a Sort of Rule with the English, to go once a Day at least, to Houses of this Sort, where they talk of Business and News, read the Papers, and often look at one another without opening their lips; and 'tis very well they are so mute; for if they were as talkative as the People of many other Nations, the Coffee-houses would be intolerable, and there would be no hearing what one Man said, where there are so many. The Chocolate-house in St. James's-street, where I go every Morning, to pass away the Time, is always so full that a Man may scarce turn about in it. Here are Dukes, and other Peers, mixed with Gentlemen; and to be admitted, [one] needs nothing more than to dress like a Gentleman.'

(Pöllnitz 1737, ii. 462–3)

This account by a German visitor to London strikes a jaundiced but revealing note. Coffee houses were part of everyday urbane sociability and keeping in the swim.

Many other forums of intellectual exchange and sociability developed too as vectors of Enlightenment: freemasonic lodges, for example, political clubs, philanthropic groupings, Vauxhall and other public gardens, theatres, conservatoires,

libraries, reading clubs, taverns, inns and brothels. In the supremely self-conscious discourse of Enlightenment, such sites were figured as so many points of light, whose combined effect was to produce a radiant collective opinion whose influence could only be socially beneficial (Jacob 1992). The Renaissance had developed the idea of fame and reputation resting on 'opinion', but it was really the Enlightenment which put the notion of 'public opinion' on the map. It was increasingly strongly valorized as a kind of supreme tribunal of human rationality. As the Genevan Jacques Necker (1732–1804), finance minister to France's Louis XVI, expressed it, public opinion had become 'an invisible power that, without treasury, guard or army, gives its laws to the city, the court and even the palaces of kings' (Baker 1988, 193; cf. Van Horn Melton 2001).

The politics of Enlightenment

Necker's view of public opinion was rosy-tinted. In fact, many of those who praised the impartiality and rationality of public opinion were themselves keen to influence and shape it. Many *philosophes* envisaged social progress working by a trickle-down from themselves to the rest of society. But they were hardly advanced democrats: 'the public' were routinely differentiated from 'the people'. Most writers viewed the latter as little better than 'the mob' and regarded the humanization of the lower classes as an extremely long-term project.

Scepticism about the slow pace of trickle-down Enlightenment led to consideration of alternative strategies for producing a rational and happy world. Some French *philosophes* followed Montesquieu, for example, in calling for a mixed and balanced polity on the English constitutional model, with separation of powers producing some of the effect that 'public opinion' could have in restraining 'despotic' tendencies in rulers. Others looked upwards for inspiration, towards rulers who might be won over to the cause of Enlightenment and could be trusted to put its precepts into effect. Voltaire's brilliant career as an Enlightenment writer and battling *philosophe* ran in counterpoint with increasingly unavailing (and pathetic) efforts to inveigle himself into favour with King Louis XV, then with Frederick II ('the Great') of Prussia. Telling truth to power could turn sycophantic and demeaning. The point was all the sadder in that in France, elective home of Enlightenment, writers risked imprisonment, exile and financial ruin for criticizing Church or state. The spectre of the Bastille was in the back of the mind of every *philosophe* who 'dared to know'.

The *philosophes* were encouraged in their efforts to act as advisers to enlightened rulers by the fact that a generation of European monarchs either exhibited interest in the idea of the Enlightenment or else put into effect reforms which formed part of the Enlightenment credo. Historians have come to call this phenomenon ENLIGHTENED DESPOTISM or ENLIGHTENED ABSOLUTISM (Blanning 1970). They were strongest in the east – notably Frederick II of Prussia (ruled 1740–86), Catherine II ('the Great': ruled 1762–96) of Russia, Joseph II (ruled 1780–90) of Austria – and in the south –

especially Charles III of Spain (ruled 1759–88), José I of Portugal (ruled 1750–77) and Duke Leopold of Tuscany (ruled 1765–90). This geography is revealing: it coincided with a geography of economic and political underdevelopment (in the east) or stalled development (notably in formerly dynamic northern Italy) ('The Early Modern Economy' in Part II). These regions lacked the growing urban orientation, burgeoning commercial capitalism and emergent entrepreneurial and middling classes of North-west Europe. Outside this north-western corner of Europe, covering England, France and the Low Countries, Enlightenment tended to be top-down and state driven. It was also less audacious in Catholic states in Southern Europe because of the continuing strength of the Catholic Church. For many individuals in these regions, the eighteenth century was less an age of Enlightenment than an age of post-Tridentine CONFESSIONALIZATION ('The Long Reformation: Catholic' in Part III).

Rulers drew on the Enlightenment for a variety of reasons. First, continuing the patronage of science begun in the seventeenth century, they looked for scientific and technological innovation to promote the economic diversification of their largely rural, PEASANT-based, 'backward' economies. The royal academies they sponsored were more likely to be concerned with improvements in military technology and hardware than in philosophical niceties; and the schools they instituted had a strong technical orientation. Second, as this suggests, rulers picked and chose among Enlightenment ideas, systematically selecting policies which strengthened the state. Thus the religious toleration upon which Frederick the Great insisted allowed him to attract to Prussia skilled industrial workers of every imaginable religious background. Third, 'enlightened despots' exploited the favourable publicity which the *philosophes* gave them in western Enlightenment circles. Enlightenment was sometimes little more than an ideological smokescreen for policies that politically attuned western intellectuals would have vigorously denounced had they been applied in the west. The ideological mileage which Catherine the Great got from proposed 'enlightened' legislative reforms in 1767, for example, far outweighed any substantial reform attempted, let alone achieved.

Enlightenment tensions

Leading *philosophes* such as Voltaire, Diderot and Kant presented the Enlightenment as a unified and collective campaign for the promotion of reason as a means of achieving a virtuous and happy society. Yet one only has to scratch the surface to see the gaps and flaws in this perspective. The Enlightenment loved a good scrap. The *philosophes* were rarely happier than when they were fighting – among themselves as well as against the Enlightenment's enemies (Figure IV.16). The vagueness of their united goal meant that the strategies for human emancipation that they advocated were infinitely various.

Outside North-western Europe, Enlightenment was for the most part a power strategy aimed at fulfilling very traditional political aims. In Catherine the Great's

Russia, for example, flirtation with the language of Enlightenment did not preclude the empress from massively extending SERFDOM (Box 2). In Southern and Eastern Europe, the level of engagement with social groupings outside the traditional elite was very small, but even within more 'advanced' North-western Europe it was far from extensive. Mass society would be a creation of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The lower orders within most of Europe must have felt that the Enlightenment had little to do with them, or indeed that it was part of some overall strategy of more effective social control (Foucault 1977). This was even more the case with indigenous peoples outside Europe subjected to the outreach of European power.

Box 2

Joseph II and the Contradictions of Enlightened Despotism

'Here Lies Joseph, Who Failed in All He Attempted.'

The epitaph which Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II (ruled 1765–90) is alleged to have provided for himself is a tombstone monument to 'enlightened despotism'. An avid reader of Voltaire and the *encyclopédistes*, Joseph was won over body and soul to the notion of social justice implicit in Enlightenment thinking. He spent the first fifteen years of power chafing at the bit as subaltern ruler to his mother, the highly pragmatic Maria Theresa (ruled 1740–80). As soon as she died, he launched a spate of radical reforms. Criminal law was revised on rational lines and the death penalty abolished. Censorship was lifted and freedom of opinion was accompanied by religious toleration. The Catholic Church became another target, especially forms of worship that Joseph judged to be irrational (numerous saints' days, baroque rituals, etc.). German was imposed as the administrative language of state. Joseph also attacked FEUDALISM on the land, bade to equalize taxation and removed numerous institutional checks to central authority. Yet he proved an enlightened young man in too much of a hurry. By the last years, the range and the speed of his reform agenda had triggered revolts by provinces resisting centralization, by nobles protesting his tax and institutional reforms, by polyglot subjects irritated at his promotion of the German language and by a Catholic populace who jibbed against his allegedly 'rational' religious measures. By the time of his premature death, he was already clipping the wings of his own ambitions and rescinding many reforms. The process was taken further by his successor, Leopold II, who as duke of Tuscany (1765–90) had been even more 'enlightened' in his policies than Joseph. Now, however, the Revolution of 1789 in France had tolled the knell of enlightened despotism and frightened rulers who had hitherto privileged enlightened reforms turned towards outright reaction (Blanning 1970).

Closer to home, it was moot whether the Enlightenment was a good thing for women either. The greater freedom of the public sphere offered women opportunities for participation in the Enlightenment project that many gladly took up. Salon hostesses (Madame de Geoffrin, Madame Necker), female scientists (Madame du

Châtelet), writers (Mary Wollstonecraft, Olympe de Gouges), painters (Madame Vigée-Lebrun, Angelica Kauffmann) and others contributed to the eighteenth century's cultural efflorescence (Schiebinger 1989). But such women also had to deal with a line of thinking – represented most powerfully by Rousseau – which held that their sex was biologically and socially equipped only for reproduction and household sociality. Domestic ideology and the notion of 'separate spheres' shaped their future (Knott and Taylor 2005; 'Gender and Family' in Part II).

Assessment

Among historians, the jury is still out on the meaning and value of the Enlightenment. The German philosopher Jürgen Habermas's highly influential work represents one end of the spectrum. For Habermas, the emergence of a 'bourgeois public sphere' which bade to break asunder the court-based cultures of the early modern

Figure IV.16. Enlightened sociability – commonly associated with sobriety, the reading of newspapers and polite conversation – was by no means devoid of heated debates and 'uncivil' behaviour. Ned Ward, 'The CoffeHous Mob': Ward 1710, frontispiece to Part IV of the *Vulgus Britannicus*.

state, establishing a zone of open, rational debate, gives an emancipatory, almost Kantian glow to the Enlightenment (Habermas 1989). At the other extreme, Michel Foucault's similarly influential writings provide a pessimistic gloss: the knowledge which the Enlightenment engendered was put to use in over-arching strategies of social discipline (Foucault 1977). Feminist and post-colonial scholars have tended to fall in behind Foucault rather than Habermas (Goodman 1994). Perhaps one of the most regrettably persistent myths of the Enlightenment portrays the movement as a single, homogeneous bloc. The unifying discourse of Enlightenment is not the best guide to how Enlightenment actually worked out in the different terrains on which it engaged. In some sense, however, contemporary disagreements form a substantial legacy: for the Enlightenment gave western society both an apprenticeship in collective rational debate within the world of modernity and an awareness of the limits of that debate.

Discussion themes

1. In what ways did the Enlightenment build on the achievements of the Scientific Revolution?
2. Who sought to enlighten whom in the Enlightenment, and for what purposes?
3. Why did the Enlightenment require 'daring' (Kant)?

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PART V
POLITICS